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METHODS OF AND SYSTEMS FOR PRODUCING DIGITAL IMAGES OF OBJECTS WITH SUBTANTIALLY REDUCED SPECKLE-NOISE POWER BY ILLUMINATING SAID OBJECTS WITH WAVEFRONT-CONTROLLED PLANAR LASER ILLUMINATION BEAMS

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CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED U.S. APPLICATIONS

This is a Continuation-in-Part of: copending Application Serial No. 09/883,130 entitled filed June 15, 2001, which is a Continuation-in-Part of Application No. 09/781,665 filed February 12, 2001; copending Application Serial No. 09/780,027 filed February 9, 2001; copending Application Serial No. 09/721,885 filed November 24, 2000; International Application PCT/US99/06505 filed March 24, 1999, published as WIPO WO 99/49411; International Application PCT/US99/28530 filed December 2, 1999, published as WIPO

Publication WO 00/33239; International Application PCT/US00/15624 filed June 7, 2000, published as WIPO Publication WO 00/75856; copending Application Serial No. 09/452,976 filed December 2, 1999; Application Serial No. 09/327,756 filed June 7, 1999, which is a Continuation-in-Part of Application Serial No. 09/305,896 filed May 5, 1999, which is a Continuation-in-Part of copending Application No. 09/275,518 filed March 24, 1999, which is a Continuation-in-Part of copending Application Nos.: 09/274,265 filed March 22, 1999; 09/243,078 filed February 2, 1999; 09/241,930 filed February 2, 1999; 09/157,778 filed September 21, 1998; 09/047,146 filed March 24, 1998, 08/949,915 filed October 14, 1997, now U.S. Letters Patent 6,158,659; 08/854,832 filed May 12, 1997, now U.S. Letters Patent 6,085,978; 08/886,806 filed April 22, 1997, now U.S. Letters Patent 5,984,185; 08/726,522 filed October 7, 1996, now U.S. Letters Patent 6,073,846; 08/573,949 filed December 18, 1995, now abandoned; each said application being commonly owned by Assignee, Metrologic Instruments, Inc., of Blackwood, New Jersey, and incorporated herein by reference as if fully set forth herein.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Field of Invention

The present invention relates generally to an improved method of and system for illuminating moving as well as stationary objects, such as parcels, during image formation and detection operations, and also to an improved method of and system for acquiring and analyzing information about the physical attributes of such objects using such improved methods of object illumination, and digital image analysis.

Brief Description Of The State Of Knowledge In The Art

The use of image-based bar code symbol readers and scanners is well known in the field of auto-identification. Examples of image-based bar code symbol reading/scanning systems include, for example, hand-hand scanners, point-of-sale (POS) scanners, and industrial-type conveyor scanning systems.

Presently, most commercial image-based bar code symbol readers are constructed using charge-coupled device (CCD) image sensing/detecting technology. Unlike laser-based scanning technology, CCD imaging technology has particular illumination requirements which differ from application to application.

Most prior art CCD-based image scanners, employed in conveyor-type package identification systems, require high-pressure sodium, metal halide or halogen lamps and large,

heavy and expensive parabolic or elliptical reflectors to produce sufficient light intensities to illuminate the large depth of field scanning fields supported by such industrial scanning systems. Even when the light from such lamps is collimated or focused using such reflectors, light strikes the target object other than where the imaging optics of the CCD-based camera are viewing. Since only a small fraction of the lamps output power is used to illuminate the CCD camera's field of view, the total output power of the lamps must be very high to obtain the illumination levels required along the field of view of the CCD camera. The balance of the output illumination power is simply wasted in the form of heat.

Most prior art CCD-based hand-held image scanners use an array of light emitting diodes (LEDs) to flood the field of view of the imaging optics in such scanning systems. A large percentage of the output illumination from these LED sources is dispersed to regions other than the field of view of the scanning system. Consequently, only a small percentage of the illumination is actually collected by the imaging optics of the system, Examples of prior art CCD hand-held image scanners employing LED illumination arrangements are disclosed in US Patent Nos. Re. 36,528, 5,777,314, 5,756,981, 5,627,358, 5,484,994, 5,786,582, and 6,123,261 to Roustaei, each assigned to Symbol Technologies, Inc. and incorporated herein by reference in its entirety. In such prior art CCD-based hand-held image scanners, an array of LEDs are mounted in a scanning head in front of a CCD-based image sensor that is provided with a cylindrical lens assembly. The LEDs are arranged at an angular orientation relative to a central axis passing through the scanning head so that a fan of light is emitted through the light transmission aperture thereof that expands with increasing distance away from the LEDs. The intended purpose of this LED illumination arrangement is to increase the "angular distance" and "depth of field" of CCD-based bar code symbol readers. However, even with such improvements in LED illumination techniques, the working distance of such hand-held CCD scanners can only be extended by using more LEDs within the scanning head of such scanners to produce greater illumination output therefrom, thereby increasing the cost, size and weight of such scanning devices.

Similarly, prior art "hold-under" and "hands-free presentation" type CCD-based image scanners suffer from shortcomings and drawbacks similar to those associated with prior art CCD-based hand-held image scanners.

Recently, there have been some technological advances made involving the use of laser illumination techniques in CCD-based image capture systems to avoid the shortcomings and drawbacks associated with using sodium-vapor illumination equipment, discussed above. In particular, US Patent No. 5,988,506 (assigned to Galore Scantec Ltd.), incorporated herein by reference, discloses the use of a cylindrical lens to generate from a single visible laser diode (VLD) a narrow focused line of laser light which fans out an angle sufficient to fully illuminate a

code pattern at a working distance. As disclosed, mirrors can be used to fold the laser illumination beam towards the code pattern to be illuminated in the working range of the system. Also, a horizontal linear lens array consisting of lenses is mounted before a linear CCD image array, to receive diffused reflected laser light from the code symbol surface. Each single lens in the linear lens array forms its own image of the code line illuminated by the laser illumination beam. Also, subaperture diaphragms are required in the CCD array plane to (i) differentiate image fields, (ii) prevent diffused reflected laser light from passing through a lens and striking the image fields of neighboring lenses, and (iii) generate partially-overlapping fields of view from each of the neighboring elements in the lens array. However, while avoiding the use of external sodium vapor illumination equipment, this prior art laser-illuminated CCD-based image capture system suffers from several significant shortcomings and drawbacks. In particular, it requires very complex image forming optics which makes this system design difficult and expensive to manufacture, and imposes a number of undesirable constraints which are very difficult to satisfy when constructing an auto-focus/auto-zoom image acquisition and analysis system for use in demanding applications.

When detecting images of target objects illuminated by a coherent illumination source (e.g. a VLD), "speckle"(i.e. substrate or paper) noise is typically modulated onto the laser illumination beam during reflection/scattering, and ultimately speckle-noise patterns are produced at the CCD image detection array, severely reducing the signal-to-noise (SNR) ratio of the CCD camera system. In general, speckle-noise patterns are generated whenever the phase of the optical field is randomly modulated. The prior art system disclosed in US Patent No. 5,988,506 fails to provide any way of, or means for reducing speckle-noise patterns produced at its CCD image detector thereof, by its coherent laser illumination source.

The problem of speckle-noise patterns in laser scanning systems is mathematically analyzed in the twenty-five (25) slide show entitled "Speckle Noise and Laser Scanning Systems" by Sasa Kresic-Juric, Emanuel Marom and Leonard Bergstein, of Symbol Technologies, Holtsville, NY, published at http://www.ima.umn.edu/industrial/99-2000/kresic/sld001.htm, and incorporated herein by reference. Notably, Slide 11/25 of this WWW publication summaries two generally well known methods of reducing speckle-noise by superimposing statistically independent (time-varying) speckle-noise patterns: (1) using multiple laser beams to illuminate different regions of the speckle-noise scattering plane (i.e. object); or (2) using multiple laser beams with different wavelengths to illuminate the scattering plane. Also, the celebrated textbook by J.C. Dainty, et al, entitled "Laser Speckle and Related Phenomena" (Second edition), published by Springer-Verlag, 1994, incorporated herein by reference, describes a collection of techniques which have been developed by others over the years in effort to reduce speckle-noise patterns in diverse application environments.

However, the prior art generally fails to disclose, teach or suggest how such prior art speckle-reduction techniques might be successfully practiced in laser illuminated CCD-based camera systems.

Thus, there is a great need in the art for an improved method of and apparatus for illuminating the surface of objects during image formation and detection operations, and also an improved method of and apparatus for producing digital images using such improved methods object illumination, while avoiding the shortcomings and drawbacks of prior art illumination, imaging and scanning systems and related methodologies.

OBJECTS AND SUMMARY OF THE PRESENT INVENTION

Accordingly, a primary object of the present invention is to provide an improved method of and system for illuminating the surface of objects during image formation and detection operations and also improved methods of and systems for producing digital images using such improved methods object illumination, while avoiding the shortcomings and drawbacks of prior art systems and methodologies.

Another object of the present invention is to provide such an improved method of and system for illuminating the surface of objects using a linear array of laser light emitting devices configured together to produce a substantially planar beam of laser illumination which extends in substantially the same plane as the field of view of the linear array of electronic image detection cells of the system, along at least a portion of its optical path within its working distance.

Another object of the present invention is to provide such an improved method of and system for producing digital images of objects using a visible laser diode array for producing a planar laser illumination beam for illuminating the surfaces of such objects, and also an electronic image detection array for detecting laser light reflected off the illuminated objects during illumination and imaging operations.

Another object of the present invention is to provide an improved method of and system for illuminating the surfaces of object to be imaged, using an array of planar laser illumination modules which employ VLDs that are smaller, and cheaper, run cooler, draw less power, have longer lifetimes, and require simpler optics (i.e. because the spectral bandwidths of VLDs are very small compared to the visible portion of the electromagnetic spectrum).

Another object of the present invention is to provide such an improved method of and system for illuminating the surfaces of objects to be imaged, wherein the VLD concentrates all of its output power into a thin laser beam illumination plane which spatially coincides exactly with the field of view of the imaging optics of the system, so very little light energy is wasted.

Another object of the present invention is to provide a planar laser illumination and imaging (PLIIM) system, wherein the working distance of the system can be easily extended by simply changing the beam focusing and imaging optics, and without increasing the output power of the visible laser diode (VLD) sources employed therein.

Another object of the present invention is to provide a planar laser illumination and imaging system, wherein each planar laser illumination beam is focused so that the minimum width thereof (e.g. 0.6 mm along its non-spreading direction) occurs at a point or plane which is the farthest object distance at which the system is designed to capture images.

Another object of the present invention is to provide a planar laser illumination and imaging system, wherein a fixed focal length imaging subsystem is employed, and the laser beam focusing technique of the present invention helps compensate for decreases in the power density of the incident planar illumination beam due to the fact that the width of the planar laser illumination beam increases for increasing distances away from the imaging subsystem.

Another object of the present invention is to provide a planar laser illumination and imaging system, wherein a variable focal length (i.e. zoom) imaging subsystem is employed, and the laser beam focusing technique of the present invention helps compensate for (i) decreases in the power density of the incident illumination beam due to the fact that the width of the planar laser illumination beam (i.e. beamwidth) along the direction of the beam's planar extent increases for increasing distances away from the imaging subsystem, and (ii) any $1/r^2$ type losses that would typically occur when using the planar laser illumination beam of the present invention.

Another object of the present invention is to provide a planar laser illumination and imaging system, wherein scanned objects need only be illuminated along a single plane which is coplanar with a planar section of the field of view of the image formation and detection module being used in the PLIIM system.

Another object of the present invention is to provide a planar laser illumination and imaging system, wherein low-power, light-weight, high-response, ultra-compact, high-efficiency solid-state illumination producing devices, such as visible laser diodes (VLDs), are used to selectively illuminate ultra-narrow sections of a target object during image formation and detection operations, in contrast with high-power, low-response, heavy-weight, bulky, low-efficiency lighting equipment (e.g. sodium vapor lights) required by prior art illumination and image detection systems.

Another object of the present invention is to provide a planar laser illumination and imaging system, wherein the planar laser illumination technique enables modulation of the spatial and/or temporal intensity of the transmitted planar laser illumination beam, and use of

simple (i.e. substantially monochromatic) lens designs for substantially monochromatic optical illumination and image formation and detection operations.

Another object of the present invention is to provide a planar laser illumination and imaging system, wherein special measures are undertaken to ensure that (i) a minimum safe distance is maintained between the VLDs in each PLIM and the user's eyes using a light shield, and (ii) the planar laser illumination beam is prevented from directly scattering into the FOV of the image formation and detection module within the system housing.

Another object of the present invention is to provide a planar laser illumination and imaging system, wherein the planar laser illumination beam and the field of view of the image formation and detection module do not overlap on any optical surface within the PLIIM system.

Another object of the present invention is to provide a planar laser illumination and imaging system, wherein the planar laser illumination beams are permitted to spatially overlap with the FOV of the imaging lens of the PLIIM only outside of the system housing, measured at a particular point beyond the light transmission window, through which the FOV is projected.

Another object of the present invention is to provide a planar laser illumination (PLIM) system for use in illuminating objects being imaged.

Another object of the present invention is to provide a planar laser illumination and imaging system, wherein the monochromatic imaging module is realized as an array of electronic image detection cells (e.g. CCD).

Another object of the present invention is to provide a planar laser illumination and imaging system, wherein the planar laser illumination arrays (PLIAs) and the image formation and detection (IFD) module (i.e. camera module) are mounted in strict optical alignment on an optical bench such that there is substantially no relative motion, caused by vibration or temperature changes, is permitted between the imaging lens within the IFD module and the VLD/cylindrical lens assemblies within the PLIAs.

Another object of the present invention is to provide a planar laser illumination and imaging system, wherein the imaging module is realized as a photographic image recording module.

Another object of the present invention is to provide a planar laser illumination and imaging system, wherein the imaging module is realized as an array of electronic image detection cells (e.g. CCD) having short integration time settings for performing high-speed image capture operations.

Another object of the present invention is to provide a planar laser illumination and imaging system, wherein a pair of planar laser illumination arrays are mounted about an image formation and detection module having a field of view, so as to produce a substantially planar

laser illumination beam which is coplanar with the field of view during object illumination and imaging operations.

Another object of the present invention is to provide a planar laser illumination and imaging system, wherein an image formation and detection module projects a field of view through a first light transmission aperture formed in the system housing, and a pair of planar laser illumination arrays project a pair of planar laser illumination beams through second set of light transmission apertures which are optically isolated from the first light transmission aperture to prevent laser beam scattering within the housing of the system.

Another object of the present invention is to provide a planar laser illumination and imaging system, the principle of Gaussian summation of light intensity distributions is employed to produce a planar laser illumination beam having a power density across the width the beam which is substantially the same for both far and near fields of the system.

Another object of the present invention is to provide an improved method of and system for producing digital images of objects using planar laser illumination beams and electronic image detection arrays.

Another object of the present invention is to provide an improved method of and system for producing a planar laser illumination beam to illuminate the surface of objects and electronically detecting light reflected off the illuminated objects during planar laser beam illumination operations.

Another object of the present invention is to provide a hand-held laser illuminated image detection and processing device for use in reading bar code symbols and other character strings.

Another object of the present invention is to provide an improved method of and system for producing images of objects by focusing a planar laser illumination beam within the field of view of an imaging lens so that the minimum width thereof along its non-spreading direction occurs at the farthest object distance of the imaging lens.

Another object of the present invention is to provide planar laser illumination modules (PLIMs) for use in electronic imaging systems, and methods of designing and manufacturing the same.

Another object of the present invention is to provide a Planar Laser Illumination Module (PLIM) for producing substantially planar laser beams (PLIBs) using a linear diverging lens having the appearance of a prism with a relatively sharp radius at the apex, capable of expanding a laser beam in only one direction.

Another object of the present invention is to provide a planar laser illumination module (PLIM) comprising an optical arrangement employs a convex reflector or a concave lens to

spread a laser beam radially and also a cylindrical-concave reflector to converge the beam linearly to project a laser line.

Another object of the present invention is to provide a planar laser illumination module (PLIM) comprising a visible laser diode (VLD), a pair of small cylindrical (i.e. PCX and PCV) lenses mounted within a lens barrel of compact construction, permitting independent adjustment of the lenses along both translational and rotational directions, thereby enabling the generation of a substantially planar laser beam therefrom.

Another object of the present invention is to provide a multi-axis VLD mounting assembly embodied within planar laser illumination array (PLIA) to achieve a desired degree of uniformity in the power density along the PLIB generated from said PLIA.

Another object of the present invention is to provide a multi-axial VLD mounting assembly within a PLIM so that (1) the PLIM can be adjustably tilted about the optical axis of its VLD, by at least a few degrees measured from the horizontal reference plane as shown in Fig. 1B4, and so that (2) each VLD block can be adjustably pitched forward for alignment with other VLD beams.

Another object of the present invention is to provide planar laser illumination arrays (PLIAs) for use in electronic imaging systems, and methods of designing and manufacturing the same.

Another object of the present invention is to provide a unitary object attribute (i.e. feature) acquisition and analysis system completely contained within in a single housing of compact lightweight construction (e.g. less than 40 pounds).

Another object of the present invention is to provide such a unitary object attribute acquisition and analysis system, which is capable of (1) acquiring and analyzing in real-time the physical attributes of objects such as, for example, (i) the surface reflectivity characteristics of objects, (ii) geometrical characteristics of objects, including shape measurement, (iii) the motion (i.e. trajectory) and velocity of objects, as well as (iv) bar code symbol, textual, and other information-bearing structures disposed thereon, and (2) generating information structures representative thereof for use in diverse applications including, for example, object identification, tracking, and/or transportation/routing operations.

Another object of the present invention is to provide such a unitary object attribute acquisition and analysis system, wherein a multi-wavelength (i.e. color-sensitive) Laser Doppler Imaging and Profiling (LDIP) subsystem is provided for acquiring and analyzing (in real-time) the physical attributes of objects such as, for example, (i) the surface reflectivity characteristics of objects, (ii) geometrical characteristics of objects, including shape measurement, and (iii) the motion (i.e. trajectory) and velocity of objects.

Another object of the present invention is to provide such a unitary object attribute acquisition and analysis system, wherein an image formation and detection (i.e. camera) subsystem is provided having (i) a planar laser illumination and imaging (PLIIM) subsystem, (ii) intelligent auto-focus/auto-zoom imaging optics, and (iii) a high-speed electronic image detection array with height/velocity-driven photo-integration time control to ensure the capture of images having constant image resolution (i.e. constant dpi) independent of package height.

Another object of the present invention is to provide such a unitary object attribute acquisition and analysis system, wherein an advanced image-based bar code symbol decoder is provided for reading 1-D and 2-D bar code symbol labels on objects, and an advanced optical character recognition (OCR) processor is provided for reading textual information, such as alphanumeric character strings, representative within digital images that have been captured and lifted from the system.

Another object of the present invention is to provide such a unitary object attribute acquisition and analysis system for use in the high-speed parcel, postal and material handling industries.

Another object of the present invention is to provide such a unitary object attribute acquisition and analysis system, which is capable of being used to identify, track and route packages, as well as identify individuals for security and personnel control applications.

Another object of the present invention is to provide such a unitary object attribute acquisition and analysis system which enables bar code symbol reading of linear and two-dimensional bar codes, OCR-compatible image lifting, dimensioning, singulation, object (e.g. package) position and velocity measurement, and label-to-parcel tracking from a single overhead-mounted housing measuring less than or equal to 20 inches in width, 20 inches in length, and 8 inches in height.

Another object of the present invention is to provide such a unitary object attribute acquisition and analysis system which employs a built-in source for producing a planar laser illumination beam that is coplanar with the field of view (FOV) of the imaging optics used to form images on an electronic image detection array, thereby eliminating the need for large, complex, high-power power consuming sodium vapor lighting equipment used in conjunction with most industrial CCD cameras.

Another object of the present invention is to provide such a unitary object attribute acquisition and analysis system, wherein the all-in-one (i.e. unitary) construction simplifies installation, connectivity, and reliability for customers as it utilizes a single input cable for supplying input (AC) power and a single output cable for outputting digital data to host systems.

Another object of the present invention is to provide such a unitary object attribute acquisition and analysis system, wherein such systems can be configured to construct multi-sided tunnel-type imaging systems, used in airline baggage-handling systems, as well as in postal and parcel identification, dimensioning and sortation systems.

Another object of the present invention is to provide such a unitary object attribute acquisition and analysis system, for use in (i) automatic checkout solutions installed within retail shopping environments (e.g. supermarkets), (ii) security and people analysis applications, (iii) object and/or material identification and inspection systems, as well as (iv) diverse portable, in-counter and fixed applications in virtual any industry.

Another object of the present invention is to provide such a unitary object attribute acquisition and analysis system in the form of a high-speed package dimensioning and identification system, wherein the PLIIM subsystem projects a field of view through a first light transmission aperture formed in the system housing, and a pair of planar laser illumination beams through second and third light transmission apertures which are optically isolated from the first light transmission aperture to prevent laser beam scattering within the housing of the system, and the LDIP subsystem projects a pair of laser beams at different angles through a fourth light transmission aperture.

Another object of the present invention is to provide a fully automated unitary-type package identification and measuring system contained within a single housing or enclosure, wherein a PLIIM-based scanning subsystem is used to read bar codes on packages passing below or near the system, while a package dimensioning subsystem is used to capture information about attributes (i.e. features) about the package prior to being identified.

Another object of the present invention is to provide such an automated package identification and measuring system, wherein Laser Detecting And Ranging (LADAR) based scanning methods are used to capture two-dimensional range data maps of the space above a conveyor belt structure, and two-dimensional image contour tracing techniques and corner point reduction techniques are used to extract package dimension data therefrom.

Another object of the present invention is to provide such a unitary system, wherein the package velocity is automatically computed using package range data collected by a pair of amplitude-modulated (AM) laser beams projected at different angular projections over the conveyor belt.

Another object of the present invention is to provide such a system in which the lasers beams having multiple wavelengths are used to sense packages having a wide range of reflectivity characteristics.

Another object of the present invention is to provide an improved image-based hand-held scanners, body-wearable scanners, presentation-type scanners, and hold-under scanners which embody the PLIIM subsystem of the present invention.

Another object of the present invention is to provide a planar laser illumination and imaging (PLIIM) system which employs high-resolution wavefront control methods and devices to reduce the power of speckle-noise patterns within digital images acquired by the system.

Another object of the present invention is to provide such a PLIIM-based system, in which planar laser illumination beams (PLIBs) rich in spectral-harmonic components on the time-frequency domain are optically generated using principles based on wavefront spatio-temporal dynamics.

Another object of the present invention is to provide such a PLIIM-based system, in which planar laser illumination beams (PLIBs) rich in spectral-harmonic components on the time-frequency domain are optically generated using principles based on wavefront non-linear dynamics.

Another object of the present invention is to provide such a PLIIM-based system, in which planar laser illumination beams (PLIBs) rich in spectral-harmonic components on the spatial-frequency domain are optically generated using principles based on wavefront spatio-temporal dynamics.

Another object of the present invention is to provide such a PLIIM-based system, in which planar laser illumination beams (PLIBs) rich in spectral-harmonic components on the spatial-frequency domain are optically generated using principles based on wavefront non-linear dynamics.

Another object of the present invention is to provide such a PLIIM-based system, in which planar laser illumination beams (PLIBs) rich in spectral-harmonic components are optically generated using diverse electro-optical devices including, for example, micro-electro-mechanical devices (MEMs) (e.g. deformable micro-mirrors), optically-addressed liquid crystal (LC) light valves, liquid crystal (LC) phase modulators, micro-oscillating reflectors (e.g. mirrors or spectrally-tuned polarizing reflective CLC film material), micro-oscillating refractive-type phase modulators, micro-oscillating diffractive-type micro-oscillators, as well as rotating phase modulation discs, bands, rings and the like.

Another object of the present invention is to provide a novel planar laser illumination and imaging (PLIIM) system and method which employs a planar laser illumination array (PLIA) and electronic image detection array which cooperate to effectively reduce the speckle-noise pattern observed at the image detection array of the PLIIM system by reducing or destroying either (i) the spatial and/or temporal coherence of the planar laser illumination

beams (PLIBs) produced by the PLIAs within the PLIIM system, or (ii) the spatial and/or temporal coherence of the planar laser illumination beams (PLIBs) that are reflected/scattered off the target and received by the image formation and detection (IFD) subsystem within the PLIIM system.

Another object of the present invention is to provide a first generalized method of speckle-noise pattern reduction and particular forms of apparatus therefor based on reducing the spatial-coherence of the planar laser illumination beam before it illuminates the target object by applying spatial phase modulation techniques during the transmission of the PLIB towards the target.

Another object of the present invention is to provide such a method and apparatus, based on the principle of spatially phase modulating the transmitted planar laser illumination beam (PLIB) prior to illuminating a target object (e.g. package) therewith so that the object is illuminated with a spatially coherent-reduced planar laser beam and, as a result, numerous substantially different time-varying speckle-noise patterns are produced and detected over the photo-integration time period of the image detection array (in the IFD subsystem), thereby allowing these speckle-noise patterns to be temporally averaged and possibly spatially averaged over the photo-integration time period and the RMS power of observable speckle-noise pattern reduced.

Another object of the present invention is to provide a novel method of and apparatus for reducing the power of speckle-noise patterns observable at the electronic image detection array of a PLIIM-based system, wherein the method involves modulating the spatial phase of the composite-type "transmitted" planar laser illumination beam (PLIB) prior to illuminating an object (e.g. package) therewith so that the object is illuminated with a spatially coherent-reduced laser beam and, as a result, numerous time-varying (random) speckle-noise patterns are produced and detected over the photo-integration time period of the image detection array in the IFD subsystem, thereby allowing these speckle-noise patterns to be temporally averaged and/or spatially averaged and the observable speckle-noise pattern reduced.

Another object of the present invention is to provide such a method of and apparatus for reducing the power of speckle-noise patterns observable at the electronic image detection array of a PLIIM-based system, wherein (i) the spatial phase of the transmitted PLIB is modulated along the planar extent thereof according to a spatial phase modulation function (SPMF) so as to modulate the phase along the wavefront of the PLIB and produce numerous substantially different time-varying speckle-noise patterns to occur at the image detection array of the IFD Subsystem during the photo-integration time period of the image detection array thereof, and also (ii) the numerous time-varying speckle-noise patterns produced at the image detection

array are temporally and/or spatially averaged during the photo-integration time period thereof, thereby reducing the speckle-noise patterns observed at the image detection array.

Another object of the present invention is to provide such a method of and apparatus for reducing the power of speckle-noise patterns observable at the electronic image detection array of a PLIIM-based system, wherein the spatial phase modulation techniques that can be used to carry out the method include, for example: mechanisms for moving the relative position/motion of a cylindrical lens array and laser diode array, including reciprocating a pair of rectilinear cylindrical lens arrays relative to each other, as well as rotating a cylindrical lens array ring structure about each PLIM employed in the PLIIM-based system; rotating phase modulation discs having multiple sectors with different refractive indices to effect different degrees of phase delay along the wavefront of the PLIB transmitted (along different optical paths) towards the object to be illuminated; acousto-optical Bragg-type cells for enabling beam steering using ultrasonic waves; ultrasonically-driven deformable mirror structures; a LCD-type spatial phase modulation panel; and other spatial phase modulation devices.

Another object of the present invention is to provide such a method and apparatus, wherein the transmitted planar laser illumination beam (PLIB) is spatially phase modulated along the planar extent thereof according to a (random or periodic) spatial phase modulation function (SPMF) prior to illumination of the target object with the PLIB, so as to modulate the phase along the wavefront of the PLIB and produce numerous substantially different time-varying speckle-noise pattern at the image detection array, and temporally and spatially average these speckle-noise patterns at the image detection array during the photo-integration time period thereof to reduce the RMS power of observable speckle-pattern noise.

Another object of the present invention is to provide such a method and apparatus, wherein the spatial phase modulation techniques that can be used to carry out the first generalized method of despeckling include, for example: mechanisms for moving the relative position/motion of a cylindrical lens array and laser diode array, including reciprocating a pair of rectilinear cylindrical lens arrays relative to each other, as well as rotating a cylindrical lens array ring structure about each PLIM employed in the PLIIM-based system; rotating phase modulation discs having multiple sectors with different refractive indices to effect different degrees of phase delay along the wavefront of the PLIB transmitted (along different optical paths) towards the object to be illuminated; acousto-optical Bragg-type cells for enabling beam steering using ultrasonic waves; ultrasonically-driven deformable mirror structures; a LCD-type spatial phase modulation panel; and other spatial phase modulation devices.

Another object of the present invention is to provide such a method and apparatus, wherein a pair of refractive cylindrical lens arrays are micro-oscillated relative to each other in

order to spatial phase modulate the planar laser illumination beam prior to target object illumination.

Another object of the present invention is to provide such a method and apparatus, wherein a pair of light diffractive (e.g. holographic) cylindrical lens arrays are micro-oscillated relative to each other in order to spatial phase modulate the planar laser illumination beam prior to target object illumination.

Another object of the present invention is to provide such a method and apparatus, wherein a pair of reflective elements are micro-oscillated relative to a stationary refractive cylindrical lens array in order to spatial phase modulate a planar laser illumination beam prior to target object illumination.

Another object of the present invention is to provide such a method and apparatus, wherein the planar laser illumination (PLIB) is micro-oscillated using an acoustic-optic modulator in order to spatial phase modulate the PLIB prior to target object illumination.

Another object of the present invention is to provide such a method and apparatus, wherein the planar laser illumination (PLIB) is micro-oscillated using a piezo-electric driven deformable mirror structure in order to spatial phase modulate said PLIB prior to target object illumination.

Another object of the present invention is to provide such a method and apparatus, wherein the planar laser illumination (PLIB) is micro-oscillated using a refractive-type phase-modulation disc in order to spatial phase modulate said PLIB prior to target object illumination.

Another object of the present invention is to provide such a method and apparatus, wherein the planar laser illumination (PLIB) is micro-oscillated using a phase-only type LCD-based phase modulation panel in order to spatial phase modulate said PLIB prior to target object illumination.

Another object of the present invention is to provide such a method and apparatus, wherein the planar laser illumination (PLIB) is micro-oscillated using a refractive-type cylindrical lens array ring structure in order to spatial phase modulate said PLIB prior to target object illumination

Another object of the present invention is to provide such a method and apparatus, wherein the planar laser illumination (PLIB) is micro-oscillated using a diffractive-type cylindrical lens array ring structure in order to spatial intensity modulate said PLIB prior to target object illumination.

Another object of the present invention is to provide such a method and apparatus, wherein the planar laser illumination (PLIB) is micro-oscillated using a reflective-type phase

modulation disc structure in order to spatial phase modulate said PLIB prior to target object illumination.

Another object of the present invention is to provide such a method and apparatus, wherein a planar laser illumination (PLIB) is micro-oscillated using a rotating polygon lens structure which spatial phase modulates said PLIB prior to target object illumination.

Another object of the present invention is to provide a second generalized method of speckle-noise pattern reduction and particular forms of apparatus therefor based on reducing the temporal coherence of the planar laser illumination beam before it illuminates the target object by applying temporal intensity modulation techniques during the transmission of the PLIB towards the target.

Another object of the present invention is to provide such a method and apparatus, based on the principle of temporal intensity modulating the transmitted planar laser illumination beam (PLIB) prior to illuminating a target object (e.g. package) therewith so that the object is illuminated with a spatially coherent-reduced planar laser beam and, as a result, numerous substantially different time-varying speckle-noise patterns are produced and detected over the photo-integration time period of the image detection array (in the IFD subsystem), thereby allowing these speckle-noise patterns to be temporally averaged and possibly spatially averaged over the photo-integration time period and the RMS power of observable speckle-noise pattern reduced.

Another object of the present invention is to provide a novel method of and apparatus for reducing the power of speckle-noise patterns observable at the electronic image detection array of a PLIIM-based system, wherein the method involves modulating the temporal intensity of the composite-type "transmitted" planar laser illumination beam (PLIB) prior to illuminating an object (e.g. package) therewith so that the object is illuminated with a temporally coherent-reduced laser beam and, as a result, numerous time-varying (random) speckle-noise patterns are produced and detected over the photo-integration time period of the image detection array in the IFD subsystem, thereby allowing these speckle-noise patterns to be temporally averaged and/or spatially averaged and the observable speckle-noise pattern reduced.

Another object of the present invention is to provide such a method and apparatus, wherein the transmitted planar laser illumination beam (PLIB) is temporal intensity modulated prior to illuminating a target object (e.g. package) therewith so that the object is illuminated with a temporally coherent-reduced planar laser beam and, as a result, numerous substantially different time-varying speckle-noise patterns are produced and detected over the photo-integration time period of the image detection array (in the IFD subsystem), thereby allowing these speckle-noise patterns to be temporally averaged and/or spatially averaged and the observable speckle-noise patterns reduced.

Another object of the present invention is to provide a novel method of and apparatus for reducing the power of speckle-noise patterns observable at the electronic image detection array of a PLIIM-based system, based on temporal intensity modulating the transmitted PLIB prior to illuminating an object therewith so that the object is illuminated with a temporally coherent-reduced laser beam and, as a result, numerous time-varying (random) speckle-noise patterns are produced at the image detection array in the IFD subsystem over the photo-integration time period thereof, and the numerous time-varying speckle-noise patterns are temporally and/or spatially averaged during the photo-integration time period, thereby reducing the RMS power of speckle-noise pattern observed at the image detection array.

Another object of the present invention is to provide such a method of and apparatus for reducing the power of speckle-noise patterns observable at the electronic image detection array of a PLIIM-based system, wherein (i) the transmitted PLIB is temporal-intensity modulated according to a temporal intensity modulation (e.g. windowing) function (TIMF) causing the phase along the wavefront of the transmitted PLIB to be modulated and numerous substantially different time-varying speckle-noise patterns produced at image detection array of the IFD Subsystem, and (ii) the numerous time-varying speckle-noise patterns produced at the image detection array are temporally and/or spatially averaged during the photo-integration time period thereof, thereby reducing the RMS power of RMS speckle-noise patterns observed (i.e. detected) at the image detection array.

Another object of the present invention is to provide such a method of and apparatus for reducing the power of speckle-noise patterns observable at the electronic image detection array of a PLIIM-based system, wherein temporal intensity modulation techniques which can be used to carry out the method include, for example: visible mode-locked laser diodes (MLLDs) employed in the planar laser illumination array; electro-optical temporal intensity modulation panels (i.e. shutters) disposed along the optical path of the transmitted PLIB; and other temporal intensity modulation devices.

Another object of the present invention is to provide such a method and apparatus, wherein temporal intensity modulation techniques which can be used to carry out the first generalized method include, for example: mode-locked laser diodes (MLLDs) employed in a planar laser illumination array; electrically-passive optically-reflective cavities affixed external to the VLD of a planar laser illumination module (PLIM; electro-optical temporal intensity modulators disposed along the optical path of a composite planar laser illumination beam; laser beam frequency-hopping devices; internal and external type laser beam frequency modulation (FM) devices; and internal and external laser beam amplitude modulation (AM) devices.

Another object of the present invention is to provide such a method and apparatus, wherein the planar laser illumination beam is temporal intensity modulated prior to target object illumination employing high-speed beam gating/shutter principles.

Another object of the present invention is to provide such a method and apparatus, wherein the planar laser illumination beam is temporal intensity modulated prior to target object illumination employing visible mode-locked laser diodes (MLLDs).

Another object of the present invention is to provide such a method and apparatus, wherein the planar laser illumination beam is temporal intensity modulated prior to target object illumination employing current-modulated visible laser diodes (VLDs) operated in accordance with temporal intensity modulation functions (TIMFS) which exhibit a spectral harmonic constitution that results in a substantial reduction in the RMS power of speckle-pattern noise observed at the image detection array of PLIIM-based systems.

Another object of the present invention is to provide a third generalized method of speckle-noise pattern reduction and particular forms of apparatus therefor based on reducing the temporal-coherence of the planar laser illumination beam before it illuminates the target object by applying temporal phase modulation techniques during the transmission of the PLIB towards the target.

Another object of the present invention is to provide such a method and apparatus, based on the principle of temporal phase modulating the transmitted planar laser illumination beam (PLIB) prior to illuminating a target object (e.g. package) therewith so that the object is illuminated with a temporal coherent-reduced planar laser beam and, as a result, numerous substantially different time-varying speckle-noise patterns are produced and detected over the photo-integration time period of the image detection array (in the IFD subsystem), thereby allowing these speckle-noise patterns to be temporally averaged and possibly spatially averaged over the photo-integration time period and the RMS power of observable speckle-noise pattern reduced.

Another object of the present invention is to provide a novel method of and apparatus for reducing the power of speckle-noise patterns observable at the electronic image detection array of a PLIIM-based system, wherein the method involves modulating the temporal phase of the composite-type "transmitted" planar laser illumination beam (PLIB) prior to illuminating an object (e.g. package) therewith so that the object is illuminated with a temporal coherent-reduced laser beam and, as a result, numerous time-varying (random) speckle-noise patterns are produced and detected over the photo-integration time period of the image detection array in the IFD subsystem, thereby allowing these speckle-noise patterns to be temporally averaged and/or spatially averaged and the observable speckle-noise pattern reduced.

Another object of the present invention is to provide such a method and apparatus, wherein temporal phase modulation techniques which can be used to carry out the third generalized method include, for example: an optically-reflective cavity (i.e. etalon device) affixed to external portion of each VLD; a phase-only LCD temporal intensity modulation panel; and fiber optical arrays.

Another object of the present invention is to provide such a method and apparatus, wherein the planar laser illumination beam is temporal phase modulated prior to target object illumination employing photon trapping, delaying and releasing principles within an optically reflective cavity (i.e. etalon) externally affixed to each visible laser diode within the planar laser illumination array

Another object of the present invention is to provide such a method and apparatus, wherein the planar laser illumination (PLIB) is temporal phase modulated using a phase-only type LCD-based phase modulation panel prior to target object illumination

Another object of the present invention is to provide such a method and apparatus, wherein the planar laser illumination beam (PLIB) is temporal phase modulated using a high-density fiber-optic array prior to target object illumination.

Another object of the present invention is to provide a fourth generalized method of speckle-noise pattern reduction and particular forms of apparatus therefor based on reducing the temporal coherence of the planar laser illumination beam before it illuminates the target object by applying temporal frequency modulation techniques during the transmission of the PLIB towards the target.

Another object of the present invention is to provide such a method and apparatus, based on the principle of temporal frequency modulating the transmitted planar laser illumination beam (PLIB) prior to illuminating a target object (e.g. package) therewith so that the object is illuminated with a spatially coherent-reduced planar laser beam and, as a result, numerous substantially different time-varying speckle-noise patterns are produced and detected over the photo-integration time period of the image detection array (in the IFD subsystem), thereby allowing these speckle-noise patterns to be temporally averaged and possibly spatially averaged over the photo-integration time period and the RMS power of observable speckle-noise pattern reduced.

Another object of the present invention is to provide a novel method of and apparatus for reducing the power of speckle-noise patterns observable at the electronic image detection array of a PLIIM-based system, wherein the method involves modulating the temporal frequency of the composite-type "transmitted" planar laser illumination beam (PLIB) prior to illuminating an object (e.g. package) therewith so that the object is illuminated with a temporally coherent-reduced laser beam and, as a result, numerous time-varying (random)

speckle-noise patterns are produced and detected over the photo-integration time period of the image detection array in the IFD subsystem, thereby allowing these speckle-noise patterns to be temporally averaged and/or spatially averaged and the observable speckle-noise pattern reduced.

Another object of the present invention is to provide such a method and apparatus, wherein techniques which can be used to carry out the third generalized method include, for example: junction-current control techniques for periodically inducing VLDs into a mode of frequency hopping, using thermal feedback; and multi-mode visible laser diodes (VLDs) operated just above their lasing threshold.

Another object of the present invention is to provide such a method and apparatus, wherein the planar laser illumination beam is temporal frequency modulated prior to target object illumination employing drive-current modulated visible laser diodes (VLDs) into modes of frequency hopping and the like.

Another object of the present invention is to provide such a method and apparatus, wherein the planar laser illumination beam is temporal frequency modulated prior to target object illumination employing multi-mode visible laser diodes (VLDs) operated just above their lasing threshold.

Another object of the present invention is to provide such a method of and apparatus for reducing the power of speckle-noise patterns observable at the electronic image detection array of a PLIIM-based system, wherein the spatial intensity modulation techniques that can be used to carry out the method include, for example: mechanisms for moving the relative position/motion of a spatial intensity modulation array (e.g. screen) relative to a cylindrical lens array and/or a laser diode array, including reciprocating a pair of rectilinear spatial intensity modulation arrays relative to each other, as well as rotating a spatial intensity modulation array ring structure about each PLIM employed in the PLIIM-based system; a rotating spatial intensity modulation disc; and other spatial intensity modulation devices.

Another object of the present invention is to provide a fifth generalized method of speckle-noise pattern reduction and particular forms of apparatus therefor based on reducing the spatial-coherence of the planar laser illumination beam before it illuminates the target object by applying spatial intensity modulation techniques during the transmission of the PLIB towards the target.

Another object of the present invention is to provide such a method and apparatus, wherein the wavefront of the transmitted planar laser illumination beam (PLIB) is spatially intensity modulated prior to illuminating a target object (e.g. package) therewith so that the object is illuminated with a spatially coherent-reduced planar laser beam and, as a result, numerous substantially different time-varying speckle-noise patterns are produced and

detected over the photo-integration time period of the image detection array (in the IFD subsystem), thereby allowing these speckle-noise patterns to be temporally averaged and possibly spatially averaged over the photo-integration time period and the RMS power of observable speckle-noise pattern reduced.

Another object of the present invention is to provide such a method and apparatus, wherein spatial intensity modulation techniques can be used to carry out the fifth generalized method including, for example: a pair of comb-like spatial filter arrays reciprocated relative to each other at a high-speeds; rotating spatial filtering discs having multiple sectors with transmission apertures of varying dimensions and different light transmittivity to spatial intensity modulate the transmitted PLIB along its wavefront; a high-speed LCD-type spatial intensity modulation panel; and other spatial intensity modulation devices capable of modulating the spatial intensity along the planar extent of the PLIB wavefront.

Another object of the present invention is to provide such a method and apparatus, wherein a pair of spatial intensity modulation (SIM) panels are micro-oscillated with respect to the cylindrical lens array so as to spatial-intensity modulate the planar laser illumination beam (PLIB) prior to target object illumination.

Another object of the present invention is to provide a sixth generalized method of speckle-noise pattern reduction and particular forms of apparatus therefor based on reducing the spatial-coherence of the planar laser illumination beam after it illuminates the target by applying spatial intensity modulation techniques during the detection of the reflected/scattered PLIB.

Another object of the present invention is to provide a novel method of and apparatus for reducing the power of speckle-noise patterns observable at the electronic image detection array of a PLIIM-based system, wherein the method is based on spatial intensity modulating the composite-type "return" PLIB produced by the composite PLIB illuminating and reflecting and scattering off an object so that the return PLIB detected by the image detection array (in the IFD subsystem) constitutes a spatially coherent-reduced laser beam and, as a result, numerous time-varying speckle-noise patterns are detected over the photo-integration time period of the image detection array (in the IFD subsystem), thereby allowing these time-varying speckle-noise patterns to be temporally and spatially-averaged and the RMS power of the observed speckle-noise patterns reduced.

Another object of the present invention is to provide such a method of and apparatus for reducing the power of speckle-noise patterns observable at the electronic image detection array of a PLIIM-based system, wherein (i) the return PLIB produced by the transmitted PLIB illuminating and reflecting/scattering off an object is spatial-intensity modulated (along the dimensions of the image detection elements) according to a spatial-intensity modulation

function (SIMF) so as to modulate the phase along the wavefront of the composite return PLIB and produce numerous substantially different time-varying speckle-noise patterns at the image detection array in the IFD Subsystem, and also (ii) temporally and spatially average the numerous time-varying speckle-noise patterns produced at the image detection array during the photo-integration time period thereof, thereby reducing the RMS power of the speckle-noise patterns observed at the image detection array.

Another object of the present invention is to provide such a method and apparatus, wherein the composite-type "return" PLIB (produced when the transmitted PLIB illuminates and reflects and/or scatters off the target object) is spatial intensity modulated, constituting a spatially coherent-reduced laser light beam and, as a result, numerous time-varying speckle-noise patterns are detected over the photo-integration time period of the image detection array in the IFD subsystem, thereby allowing these time-varying speckle-noise patterns to be temporally and/or spatially averaged and the observable speckle-noise pattern reduced.

Another object of the present invention is to provide such a method and apparatus, wherein the return planar laser illumination beam is spatial-intensity modulated prior to detection at the image detector.

Another object of the present invention is to provide such a method and apparatus, wherein spatial intensity modulation techniques which can be used to carry out the sixth generalized method include, for example: high-speed electro-optical (e.g. ferro-electric, LCD, etc.) dynamic spatial filters, located before the image detector along the optical axis of the camera subsystem; physically rotating spatial filters, and any other spatial intensity modulation element arranged before the image detector along the optical axis of the camera subsystem, through which the received PLIB beam may pass during illumination and image detection operations for spatial intensity modulation without causing optical image distortion at the image detection array.

Another object of the present invention is to provide such a method of and apparatus for reducing the power of speckle-noise patterns observable at the electronic image detection array of a PLIIM-based system, wherein spatial intensity modulation techniques which can be used to carry out the method include, for example: a mechanism for physically or photo-electronically rotating a spatial intensity modulator (e.g. apertures, irises, etc.) about the optical axis of the imaging lens of the camera module; and any other axially symmetric, rotating spatial intensity modulation element arranged before the entrance pupil of the camera module, through which the received PLIB beam may enter at any angle or orientation during illumination and image detection operations.

Another object of the present invention is to provide a seventh generalized method of speckle-noise pattern reduction and particular forms of apparatus therefor based on reducing

the temporal coherence of the planar laser illumination beam after it illuminates the target by applying temporal intensity modulation techniques during the detection of the reflected/scattered PLIB.

Another object of the present invention is to provide such a method and apparatus, wherein the composite-type "return" PLIB (produced when the transmitted PLIB illuminates and reflects and/or scatters off the target object) is temporal intensity modulated, constituting a temporally coherent-reduced laser beam and, as a result, numerous time-varying (random) speckle-noise patterns are detected over the photo-integration time period of the image detection array (in the IFD subsystem), thereby allowing these time-varying speckle-noise patterns to be temporally and/or spatially averaged and the observable speckle-noise pattern reduced. This method can be practiced with any of the PLIM-based systems of the present invention disclosed herein, as well as any system constructed in accordance with the general principles of the present invention.

Another object of the present invention is to provide such a method and apparatus, wherein temporal intensity modulation techniques which can be used to carry out the method include, for example: high-speed temporal modulators such as electro-optical shutters, pupils, and stops, located along the optical path of the composite return PLIB focused by the IFD subsystem; etc.

Another object of the present invention is to provide such a method and apparatus, wherein the return planar laser illumination beam is temporal intensity modulated prior to image detection by employing high-speed light gating/switching principles.

Another object of the present invention is to provide "hybrid" despeckling methods and apparatus for use in conjunction with PLIIM-based systems employing linear (or area) electronic image detection arrays having vertically-elongated image detection elements, i.e. having a high height-to-width (H/W) aspect ratio.

Another object of the present invention is to provide a PLIIM-based system with an integrated speckle-pattern noise reduction subsystem, wherein a micro-oscillating cylindrical lens array micro-oscillates a planar laser illumination beam (PLIB) laterally along its planar extent to produce spatial-incoherent PLIB components and optically combines and projects said spatially-incoherent PLIB components onto the same points on the surface of an object to be illuminated, and wherein a micro-oscillating light reflecting structure micro-oscillates the PLB components transversely along the direction orthogonal to said planar extent, and a linear (1D) image detection array with vertically-elongated image detection elements detects time-varying speckle-noise patterns produced by the spatially-incoherent components reflected/scattered off the illuminated object.

Another object of the present invention is to provide PLIIM-based system with an integrated speckle-pattern noise reduction subsystem, wherein a first micro-oscillating light reflective element micro-oscillates a planar laser illumination beam (PLIB) laterally along its planar extent to produce spatially-incoherent PLIB components, a second micro-oscillating light reflecting element micro-oscillates the spatially-incoherent PLIB components transversely along the direction orthogonal to said planar extent, and wherein a stationary cylindrical lens array optically combines and projects said spatially-incoherent PLIB components onto the same points on the surface of an object to be illuminated, and a linear (1D) image detection array with vertically-elongated image detection elements detects time-varying speckle-noise patterns produced by the spatially incoherent components reflected/scattered off the illuminated object.

Another object of the present invention is to provide PLIIM-based system with an integrated speckle-pattern noise reduction subsystem, wherein an acousto-optic Bragg cell micro-oscillates a planar laser illumination beam (PLIB) laterally along its planar extent to produce spatially-incoherent PLIB components, a stationary cylindrical lens array optically combines and projects said spatially-incoherent PLIB components onto the same points on the surface of an object to be illuminated, and wherein a micro-oscillating light reflecting structure micro-oscillates the spatially-incoherent PLIB components transversely along the direction orthogonal to said planar extent, and a linear (1D) image detection array with vertically-elongated image detection elements detects time-varying speckle-noise patterns produced by spatially incoherent PLIB components reflected/scattered off the illuminated object.

Another object of the present invention is to provide PLIIM-based system with an integrated speckle-pattern noise reduction subsystem, wherein a high-resolution deformable mirror (DM) structure micro-oscillates a planar laser illumination beam (PLIB) laterally along its planar extent to produce spatially-incoherent PLIB components, a micro-oscillating light reflecting element micro-oscillates the spatially-incoherent PLIB components transversely along the direction orthogonal to said planar extent, and wherein a stationary cylindrical lens array optically combines and projects the spatially-incoherent PLIB components onto the same points on the surface of an object to be illuminated, and a linear (1D) image detection array with vertically-elongated image detection elements detects time-varying speckle-noise patterns produced by said spatially incoherent PLIB components reflected/scattered off the illuminated object.

Another object of the present invention is to provide PLIM-based system with an integrated speckle-pattern noise reduction subsystem, wherein a micro-oscillating cylindrical lens array micro-oscillates a planar laser illumination beam (PLIB) laterally along its planar extent to produce spatially-incoherent PLIB components which are optically combined and projected onto the same points on the surface of an object to be illuminated, and a micro-

oscillating light reflective structure micro-oscillates the spatially-incoherent PLIB components transversely along the direction orthogonal to said planar extent as well as the field of view (FOV) of a linear (1D) image detection array having vertically-elongated image detection elements, whereby said linear CCD detection array detects time-varying speckle-noise patterns produced by the spatially incoherent PLIB components reflected/scattered off the illuminated object.

Another object of the present invention is to provide PLIIM-based system with an integrated speckle-pattern noise reduction subsystem, wherein a micro-oscillating cylindrical lens array micro-oscillates a planar laser illumination beam (PLIB) laterally along its planar extent and produces spatially-incoherent PLIB components which are optically combined and project onto the same points of an object to be illuminated, a micro-oscillating light reflective structure micro-oscillates transversely along the direction orthogonal to said planar extent, both PLIB and the field of view (FOV) of a linear (1D) image detection array having vertically-elongated image detection elements, and a PLIB/FOV folding mirror projects the micro-oscillated PLIB and fov towards said object, whereby said linear image detection array detects time-varying speckle-noise patterns produced by the spatially incoherent PLIB components reflected/scattered off the illuminated object.

Another object of the present invention is to provide PLIIM-based system with an integrated speckle-pattern noise reduction subsystem, wherein a phase-only LCD-based phase modulation panel micro-oscillates a planar laser illumination beam (PLIB) laterally along its planar extent and produces spatially-incoherent PLIB components, a stationary cylindrical lens array optically combines and projects the spatially-incoherent PLIB components onto the same points on the surface of an object to be illuminated, and wherein a micro-oscillating light reflecting structure micro-oscillates the spatially-incoherent PLIB components transversely along the direction orthogonal to said planar extent, and a linear (1D) CCD image detection array with vertically-elongated image detection elements detects time-varying speckle-noise patterns produced by the spatially incoherent PLIB components reflected/scattered off the illuminated object.

Another object of the present invention is to provide PLIIM-based system with an integrated speckle-pattern noise reduction subsystem, wherein a multi-faceted cylindrical lens array structure rotating about its longitudinal axis within each PLIM micro-oscillates a planar laser illumination beam (PLIB) laterally along its planar extent and produces spatially-incoherent PLIB components therealong, a stationary cylindrical lens array optically combines and projects the spatially-incoherent PLIB components onto the same points on the surface of an object to be illuminated, and wherein a micro-oscillating light reflecting structure micro-oscillates the spatially-incoherent PLIB components transversely along the direction orthogonal

to said planar extent, and a linear (1D) image detection array with vertically-elongated image detection elements detects time-varying speckle-noise patterns produced by the spatially incoherent PLIB components reflected/scattered off the illuminated object.

Another object of the present invention is to provide PLIIM-based system with an integrated speckle-pattern noise reduction subsystem, wherein a multi-faceted cylindrical lens array structure within each PLIM rotates about its longitudinal and transverse axes, micro-oscillates a planar laser illumination beam (PLIB) laterally along its planar extent as well as transversely along the direction orthogonal to said planar extent, and produces spatially-incoherent PLIB components along said orthogonal directions, and wherein a stationary cylindrical lens array optically combines and projects the spatially-incoherent PLIB components onto the same points on the surface of an object to be illuminated, and a linear (1D) image detection array with vertically-elongated image detection elements detects time-varying speckle-noise patterns produced by the spatially incoherent PLIB components reflected/scattered off the illuminated object.

Another object of the present invention is to provide PLIIM-based system with an integrated hybrid-type speckle-pattern noise reduction subsystem, wherein a high-speed temporal intensity modulation panel temporal intensity modulates a planar laser illumination beam (PLIB) to produce temporally-incoherent PLIB components along its planar extent, a stationary cylindrical lens array optically combines and projects the temporally-incoherent PLIB components onto the same points on the surface of an object to be illuminated, and wherein a micro-oscillating light reflecting element micro-oscillates the PLIB transversely along the direction orthogonal to said planar extent to produce spatially-incoherent PLIB components along said transverse direction, and a linear (1D) image detection array with vertically-elongated image detection elements detects time-varying speckle-noise patterns produced by the temporally and spatially incoherent PLIB components reflected/scattered off the illuminated object.

Another object of the present invention is to provide PLIIM-based system with an integrated hybrid-type speckle-pattern noise reduction subsystem, wherein an optically-reflective cavity (i.e. etalon) externally attached to each VLD in the system temporal phase modulates a planar laser illumination beam (PLIB) to produce temporally-incoherent PLIB components along its planar extent, a stationary cylindrical lens array optically combines and projects the temporally-incoherent PLIB components onto the same points on the surface of an object to be illuminated, and wherein a micro-oscillating light reflecting element micro-oscillates the PLIB transversely along the direction orthogonal to said planar extent to produce spatially-incoherent PLIB components along said transverse direction, and a linear (1D) image detection array with vertically-elongated image detection elements detects time-varying

speckle-noise patterns produced by the temporally and spatially incoherent PLIB components reflected/scattered off the illuminated object.

Another object of the present invention is to provide PLIIM-based system with an integrated hybrid-type speckle-pattern noise reduction subsystem, wherein each visible mode locked laser diode (MLLD) employed in the PLIM of the system generates a high-speed pulsed (i.e. temporal intensity modulated) planar laser illumination beam (PLIB) having temporally-incoherent PLIB components along its planar extent, a stationary cylindrical lens array optically combines and projects the temporally-incoherent PLIB components onto the same points on the surface of an object to be illuminated, and wherein a micro-oscillating light reflecting element micro-oscillates PLIB transversely along the direction orthogonal to said planar extent to produce spatially-incoherent PLIB components along said transverse direction, and a linear (1D) image detection array with vertically-elongated image detection elements detects time-varying speckle-noise patterns produced by the temporally and spatially incoherent PLIB components reflected/scattered off the illuminated object.

Another object of the present invention is to provide PLIIM-based system with an integrated hybrid-type speckle-pattern noise reduction subsystem, wherein the visible laser diode (VLD) employed in each PLIM of the system is continually operated in a frequency-hopping mode so as to temporal frequency modulate the planar laser illumination beam (PLIB) and produce temporally-incoherent PLIB components along its planar extent, a stationary cylindrical lens array optically combines and projects the temporally-incoherent PLIB components onto the same points on the surface of an object to be illuminated, and wherein a micro-oscillating light reflecting element micro-oscillates the PLIB transversely along the direction orthogonal to said planar extent and produces spatially-incoherent PLIB components along said transverse direction, and a linear (1D) image detection array with vertically-elongated image detection elements detects time-varying speckle-noise patterns produced by the temporally and spatial incoherent PLIB components reflected/scattered off the illuminated object.

Another object of the present invention is to provide PLIIM-based system with an integrated hybrid-type speckle-pattern noise reduction subsystem, wherein a pair of micro-oscillating spatial intensity modulation panels modulate the spatial intensity along the wavefront of a planar laser illumination beam (PLIB) and produce spatially-incoherent PLIB components along its planar extent, a stationary cylindrical lens array optically combines and projects the spatially-incoherent PLIB components onto the same points on the surface of an object to be illuminated, and wherein a micro-oscillating light reflective structure micro-oscillates said PLIB transversely along the direction orthogonal to said planar extent and produces spatially-incoherent PLIB components along said transverse direction, and a linear

(1D) image detection array having vertically-elongated image detection elements detects time-varying speckle-noise patterns produced by the spatially incoherent PLIB components reflected/scattered off the illuminated object.

Another object of the present invention is to provide method of and apparatus for mounting a linear image sensor chip within a PLIIM-based system to prevent misalignment between the field of view (FOV) of said linear image sensor chip and the planar laser illumination beam (PLIB) used therewith, in response to thermal expansion or cycling within said PLIIM-based system

Another object of the present invention is to provide a novel method of mounting a linear image sensor chip relative to a heat sinking structure to prevent any misalignment between the field of view (FOV) of the image sensor chip and the PLIA produced by the PLIA within the camera subsystem, thereby improving the performance of the PLIIM-based system during planar laser illumination and imaging operations.

Another object of the present invention is to provide a camera subsystem wherein the linear image sensor chip employed in the camera is rigidly mounted to the camera body of a PLIIM-based system via a novel image sensor mounting mechanism which prevents any significant misalignment between the field of view (FOV) of the image detection elements on the linear image sensor chip and the planar laser illumination beam (PLIB) produced by the PLIA used to illuminate the FOV thereof within the IFD module (i.e. camera subsystem).

Another object of the present invention is to provide a novel method of automatically controlling the output optical power of the VLDs in the planar laser illumination array of a PLIIM-based system in response to the detected speed of objects transported along a conveyor belt, so that each digital image of each object captured by the PLIIM-based system has a substantially uniform "white" level, regardless of conveyor belt speed, thereby simplifying the software-based image processing operations which need to subsequently carried out by the image processing computer subsystem.

Another object of the present invention is to provide such a method, wherein camera control computer in the PLIIM-based system performs the following operations: (i) computes the optical power (measured in milliwatts) which each VLD in the PLIIM-based system must produce in order that each digital image captured by the PLIIM-based system will have substantially the same "white" level, regardless of conveyor belt speed; and (2) transmits the computed VLD optical power value(s) to the micro-controller associated with each PLIA in the PLIIM-based system.

Another object of the present invention is to provide a PLIIM-based systems embodying speckle-pattern noise reduction subsystems comprising a linear (1D) image sensor with vertically-elongated image detection elements, a pair of planar laser illumination modules

(PLIMs), and a 2-D PLIB micro-oscillation mechanism arranged therewith for enabling both lateral and transverse micro-movement of the planar laser illumination beam (PLIB).

Another object of the present invention is to provide a PLIIM-based system embodying an speckle-pattern noise reduction subsystem, comprising (i) an image formation and detection (IFD) module mounted on an optical bench and having a linear (1D) image sensor with vertically-elongated image detection elements characterized by a large height-to-width (H/W) aspect ratio, (ii) a pair of planar laser illumination modules (PLIMs) mounted on the optical bench on opposite sides of the IFD module, and (iii) a 2-D PLIB micro-oscillation mechanism arranged with each PLIM, and employing a micro-oscillating cylindrical lens array and a micro-oscillating PLIB reflecting mirror configured together as an optical assembly for the purpose of micro-oscillating the PLIB laterally along its planar extent as well as transversely along the direction orthogonal thereto, so that during illumination operations, the PLIB is spatial phase modulated along the planar extent thereof as well as along the direction orthogonal thereto, causing the phase along the wavefront of each transmitted PLIB to be modulated in two orthogonal dimensions and numerous substantially different time-varying speckle-noise patterns to be produced at the vertically-elongated image detection elements of the IFD Subsystem during the photo-integration time period thereof, so that these numerous time-varying speckle-noise patterns can be temporally and spatially averaged during the photo-integration time period of the image detection array, thereby reducing the RMS power level of speckle-noise patterns observed at the image detection array.

Another object of the present invention is to provide a PLIIM-based system embodying an speckle-pattern noise reduction subsystem, comprising (i) an image formation and detection (IFD) module mounted on an optical bench and having a linear (1D) image sensor with vertically-elongated image detection elements characterized by a large height-to-width (H/W) aspect ratio, (ii) a pair of planar laser illumination modules (PLIMs) mounted on the optical bench on opposite sides of the IFD module, and (iii) a 2-D PLIB micro-oscillation mechanism arranged with each PLIM, and employing a stationary PLIB folding mirror, a micro-oscillating PLIB reflecting element, and a stationary cylindrical lens array configured together as an optical assembly as shown for the purpose of micro-oscillating the PLIB laterally along its planar extent as well as transversely along the direction orthogonal thereto, so that during illumination operations, the PLIB transmitted from each PLIM is spatial phase modulated along the planar extent thereof as well as along the direction orthogonal thereto, causing the phase along the wavefront of each transmitted PLIB to be modulated in two orthogonal dimensions and numerous substantially different time-varying speckle-noise patterns to be produced at the vertically-elongated image detection elements of the IFD Subsystem during the photo-integration time period thereof, so that these numerous time-varying speckle-noise patterns can

be temporally and spatially averaged during the photo-integration time period of the image detection array, thereby reducing the RMS power level of speckle-noise patterns observed at the image detection array.

Another object of the present invention is to provide a PLIIM-based system embodying an speckle-pattern noise reduction subsystem, comprising (i) an image formation and detection (IFD) module mounted on an optical bench and having a linear (1D) image sensor with vertically-elongated image detection elements characterized by a large height-to-width (H/W) aspect ratio, (ii) a pair of planar laser illumination modules (PLIMs) mounted on the optical bench on opposite sides of the IFD module, and (iii) a 2-D PLIB micro-oscillation mechanism arranged with each PLIM, and employing a micro-oscillating cylindrical lens array and a micro-oscillating PLIB reflecting element configured together as shown as an optical assembly for the purpose of micro-oscillating the PLIB laterally along its planar extent as well as transversely along the direction orthogonal thereto, so that during illumination operations, the PLIB transmitted from each PLIM is spatial phase modulated along the planar extent thereof as well as along the direction orthogonal (i.e. transverse) thereto, causing the phase along the wavefront of each transmitted PLIB to be modulated in two orthogonal dimensions and numerous substantially different time-varying speckle-noise patterns to be produced at the vertically-elongated image detection elements of the IFD Subsystem during the photo-integration time period thereof, so that these numerous time-varying speckle-noise patterns can be temporally and spatially averaged during the photo-integration time period of the image detection array, thereby reducing the RMS power level of speckle-noise patterns observed at the image detection array.

Another object of the present invention is to provide a PLIIM-based system embodying an speckle-pattern noise reduction subsystem, comprising (i) an image formation and detection (IFD) module mounted on an optical bench and having a linear (1D) image sensor with vertically-elongated image detection elements characterized by a large height-to-width (H/W) aspect ratio, (ii) a pair of planar laser illumination modules (PLIMs) mounted on the optical bench on opposite sides of the IFD module, and (iii) a 2-D PLIB micro-oscillation mechanism arranged with each PLIM, and employing a micro-oscillating high-resolution deformable mirror structure, a stationary PLIB reflecting element and a stationary cylindrical lens array configured together as an optical assembly as shown for the purpose of micro-oscillating the PLIB laterally along its planar extent as well as transversely along the direction orthogonal thereto, so that during illumination operation, the PLIB transmitted from each PLIM is spatial phase modulated along the planar extent thereof as well as along the direction orthogonal (i.e. transverse) thereto, causing the phase along the wavefront of each transmitted PLIB to be modulated in two orthogonal dimensions and numerous substantially different time-varying

speckle-noise patterns to be produced at the vertically-elongated image detection elements of the IFD Subsystem during the photo-integration time period thereof, so that these numerous time-varying speckle-noise patterns can be temporally and spatially averaged during the photo-integration time period of the image detection array, thereby reducing the RMS power level of speckle-noise patterns observed at the image detection array.

Another object of the present invention is to provide a PLIIM-based system embodying an speckle-pattern noise reduction subsystem, comprising (i) an image formation and detection (IFD) module mounted on an optical bench and having a linear (1D) image sensor with vertically-elongated image detection elements characterized by a large height-to-width (H/W) aspect ratio, (ii) a pair of planar laser illumination modules (PLIMs) mounted on the optical bench on opposite sides of the IFD module, and (iii) a 2-D PLIB micro-oscillation mechanism arranged with each PLIM, and employing a micro-oscillating cylindrical lens array structure for micro-oscillating the PLIB laterally along its planar extend, a micro-oscillating PLIB/FOV refraction element for micro-oscillating the PLIB and the field of view (FOV) of the linear image sensor transversely along the direction orthogonal to the planar extent of the PLIB, and a stationary PLIB/FOV folding mirror configured together as an optical assembly as shown for the purpose of micro-oscillating the PLIB laterally along its planar extent while micro-oscillating both the PLIB and FOV of the linear image sensor transversely along the direction orthogonal thereto, so that during illumination operation, the PLIB transmitted from each PLIM is spatial phase modulated along the planar extent thereof as well as along the direction orthogonal (i.e. transverse) thereto, causing the phase along the wavefront of each transmitted PLIB to be modulated in two orthogonal dimensions and numerous substantially different time-varying speckle-noise patterns to be produced at the vertically-elongated image detection elements of the IFD Subsystem during the photo-integration time period thereof, so that these numerous time-varying speckle-noise patterns can be temporally and spatially averaged during the photo-integration time period of the image detection array, thereby reducing the RMS power level of speckle-noise patterns observed at the image detection array.

Another object of the present invention is to provide a PLIIM-based system embodying an speckle-pattern noise reduction subsystem, comprising (i) an image formation and detection (IFD) module mounted on an optical bench and having a linear (1D) image sensor with vertically-elongated image detection elements characterized by a large height-to-width (H/W) aspect ratio, (ii) a pair of planar laser illumination modules (PLIMs) mounted on the optical bench on opposite sides of the IFD module, and (iii) a 2-D PLIB micro-oscillation mechanism arranged with each PLIM, and employing a micro-oscillating cylindrical lens array structure for micro-oscillating the PLIB laterally along its planar extend, a micro-oscillating PLIB/FOV reflection element for micro-oscillating the PLIB and the field of view (FOV) of the linear image

sensor transversely along the direction orthogonal to the planar extent of the PLIB, and a stationary PLIB/FOV folding mirror configured together as an optical assembly as shown for the purpose of micro-oscillating the PLIB laterally along its planar extent while micro-oscillating both the PLIB and FOV of the linear image sensor transversely along the direction orthogonal thereto, so that during illumination operation, the PLIB transmitted from each PLIM is spatial phase modulated along the planar extent thereof as well as along the direction orthogonal thereto, causing the phase along the wavefront of each transmitted PLIB to be modulated in two orthogonal dimensions and numerous substantially different time-varying speckle-noise patterns to be produced at the vertically-elongated image detection elements of the IFD Subsystem during the photo-integration time period thereof, so that these numerous time-varying speckle-noise patterns can be temporally and spatially averaged during the photo-integration time period of the image detection array, thereby reducing the RMS power level of speckle-noise patterns observed at the image detection array.

Another object of the present invention is to provide a PLIIM-based system embodying an speckle-pattern noise reduction subsystem, comprising (i) an image formation and detection (IFD) module mounted on an optical bench and having a linear (1D) image sensor with vertically-elongated image detection elements characterized by a large height-to-width (H/W) aspect ratio, (ii) a pair of planar laser illumination modules (PLIMs) mounted on the optical bench on opposite sides of the IFD module, and (iii) a 2-D PLIB micro-oscillation mechanism arranged with each PLIM, and employing a phase-only LCD phase modulation panel, a stationary cylindrical lens array, and a micro-oscillating PLIB reflection element, configured together as an optical assembly as shown for the purpose of micro-oscillating the PLIB laterally along its planar extent while micro-oscillating the PLIB transversely along the direction orthogonal thereto, so that during illumination operation, the PLIB transmitted from each PLIM is spatial phase modulated along the planar extent thereof as well as along the direction orthogonal (i.e. transverse) thereto, causing the phase along the wavefront of each transmitted PLIB to be modulated in two orthogonal dimensions and numerous substantially different time-varying speckle-noise patterns to be produced at the vertically-elongated image detection elements of the IFD Subsystem during the photo-integration time period thereof, so that these numerous time-varying speckle-noise patterns can be temporally and spatially averaged during the photo-integration time period of the image detection array, thereby reducing the RMS power level of speckle-noise patterns observed at the image detection array.

Another object of the present invention is to provide a PLIIM-based system embodying an speckle-pattern noise reduction subsystem, comprising (i) an image formation and detection (IFD) module mounted on an optical bench and having a linear (1D) image sensor with vertically-elongated image detection elements characterized by a large height-to-width (H/W)

aspect ratio, (ii) a pair of planar laser illumination modules (PLIMs) mounted on the optical bench on opposite sides of the IFD module, and (iii) a 2-D PLIB micro-oscillation mechanism arranged with each PLIM, and employing a micro-oscillating multi-faceted cylindrical lens array structure, a stationary cylindrical lens array, and a micro-oscillating PLIB reflection element configured together as an optical assembly as shown, for the purpose of micro-oscillating the PLIB laterally along its planar extent while micro-oscillating the PLIB transversely along the direction orthogonal thereto, so that during illumination operation, the PLIB transmitted from each PLIM is spatial phase modulated along the planar extent thereof as well as along the direction orthogonal thereto, causing the phase along the wavefront of each transmitted PLIB to be modulated in two orthogonal dimensions and numerous substantially different time-varying speckle-noise patterns to be produced at the vertically-elongated image detection elements of the IFD Subsystem during the photo-integration time period thereof, so that these numerous time-varying speckle-noise patterns can be temporally and spatially averaged during the photo-integration time period of the image detection array, thereby reducing the RMS power level of speckle-noise patterns observed at the image detection array.

Another object of the present invention is to provide a PLIIM-based system embodying an speckle-pattern noise reduction subsystem, comprising (i) an image formation and detection (IFD) module mounted on an optical bench and having a linear (1D) image sensor with vertically-elongated image detection elements characterized by a large height-to-width (H/W) aspect ratio, (ii) a pair of planar laser illumination modules (PLIMs) mounted on the optical bench on opposite sides of the IFD module, and (iii) a 2-D PLIB micro-oscillation mechanism arranged with each PLIM, and employing a micro-oscillating multi-faceted cylindrical lens array structure (adapted for micro-oscillation about the optical axis of the VLD's laser illumination beam and along the planar extent of the PLIB) and a stationary cylindrical lens array, configured together as an optical assembly as shown, for the purpose of micro-oscillating the PLIB laterally along its planar extent while micro-oscillating the PLIB transversely along the direction orthogonal thereto, so that during illumination operation, the PLIB transmitted from each PLIM is spatial phase modulated along the planar extent thereof as well as along the direction orthogonal thereto, causing the phase along the wavefront of each transmitted PLIB to be modulated in two orthogonal dimensions and numerous substantially different time-varying speckle-noise patterns to be produced at the vertically-elongated image detection elements of the IFD Subsystem during the photo-integration time period thereof, so that these numerous time-varying speckle-noise patterns can be temporally and spatially averaged during the photo-integration time period of the image detection array, thereby reducing the RMS power level of speckle-noise patterns observed at the image detection array.

Another object of the present invention is to provide a PLIIM-based system embodying an speckle-pattern noise reduction subsystem, comprising (i) an image formation and detection (IFD) module mounted on an optical bench and having a linear (1D) image sensor with vertically-elongated image detection elements characterized by a large height-to-width (H/W) aspect ratio, (ii) a pair of planar laser illumination modules (PLIMs) mounted on the optical bench on opposite sides of the IFD module, and (iii) a hybrid-type PLIB modulation mechanism arranged with each PLIM, and employing a temporal-intensity modulation panel, a stationary cylindrical lens array, and a micro-oscillating PLIB reflection element configured together as an optical assembly as shown, for the purpose of temporal intensity modulating the PLIB uniformly along its planar extent while micro-oscillating the PLIB transversely along the direction orthogonal thereto, so that during illumination operations, the PLIB transmitted from each PLIM is spatial phase modulated along the planar extent thereof during micro-oscillation along the direction orthogonal thereto, thereby producing numerous substantially different time-varying speckle-noise patterns at the vertically-elongated image detection elements of the IFD Subsystem during the photo-integration time period thereof, so that these numerous time-varying speckle-noise patterns can be temporally and spatially averaged during the photo-integration time period of the image detection array, thereby reducing the RMS power level of speckle-noise patterns observed at the image detection array.

Another object of the present invention is to provide a PLIIM-based system embodying an speckle-pattern noise reduction subsystem, comprising (i) an image formation and detection (IFD) module mounted on an optical bench and having a linear (1D) image sensor with vertically-elongated image detection elements characterized by a large height-to-width (H/W) aspect ratio, (ii) a pair of planar laser illumination modules (PLIMs) mounted on the optical bench on opposite sides of the IFD module, and (iii) a hybrid-type PLIB modulation mechanism arranged with each PLIM, and employing a temporal-intensity modulation panel, a stationary cylindrical lens array, and a micro-oscillating PLIB reflection element configured together as an optical assembly as shown, for the purpose of temporal intensity modulating the PLIB uniformly along its planar extent while micro-oscillating the PLIB transversely along the direction orthogonal thereto, so that during illumination operations, the PLIB transmitted from each PLIM is spatial phase modulated along the planar extent thereof during micro-oscillation along the direction orthogonal thereto, thereby producing numerous substantially different time-varying speckle-noise patterns at the vertically-elongated image detection elements of the IFD Subsystem during the photo-integration time period thereof, so that these numerous time-varying speckle-noise patterns can be temporally and spatially averaged during the photo-integration time period of the image detection array, thereby reducing the RMS power level of speckle-noise patterns observed at the image detection array.

Another object of the present invention is to provide a PLIIM-based system embodying an speckle-pattern noise reduction subsystem, comprising (i) an image formation and detection (IFD) module mounted on an optical bench and having a linear (1D) image sensor with vertically-elongated image detection elements characterized by a large height-to-width (H/W) aspect ratio, (ii) a pair of planar laser illumination modules (PLIMs) mounted on the optical bench on opposite sides of the IFD module, and (iii) a hybrid-type PLIB modulation mechanism arranged with each PLIM, and employing a visible mode-locked laser diode (MLLD), a stationary cylindrical lens array, and a micro-oscillating PLIB reflection element configured together as an optical assembly as shown, for the purpose of producing a temporal intensity modulated PLIB while micro-oscillating the PLIB transversely along the direction orthogonal to its planar extent, so that during illumination operations, the PLIB transmitted from each PLIM is spatial phase modulated along the planar extent thereof during micro-oscillation along the direction orthogonal thereto, thereby producing numerous substantially different time-varying speckle-noise patterns at the vertically-elongated image detection elements of the IFD Subsystem during the photo-integration time period thereof, so that these numerous time-varying speckle-noise patterns can be temporally and spatially averaged during the photo-integration time period of the image detection array, thereby reducing the RMS power level of speckle-noise patterns observed at the image detection array.

Another object of the present invention is to provide a PLIIM-based system embodying an speckle-pattern noise reduction subsystem, comprising (i) an image formation and detection (IFD) module mounted on an optical bench and having a linear (1D) image sensor with vertically-elongated image detection elements characterized by a large height-to-width (H/W) aspect ratio, (ii) a pair of planar laser illumination modules (PLIMs) mounted on the optical bench on opposite sides of the IFD module, and (iii) a hybrid-type PLIB modulation mechanism arranged with each PLIM, and employing a visible laser diode (VLD) driven into a high-speed frequency hopping mode, a stationary cylindrical lens array, and a micro-oscillating PLIB reflection element configured together as an optical assembly as shown, for the purpose of producing a temporal frequency modulated PLIB while micro-oscillating the PLIB transversely along the direction orthogonal to its planar extent, so that during illumination operations, the PLIB transmitted from each PLIM is spatial phase modulated along the planar extent thereof during micro-oscillation along the direction orthogonal thereto, thereby producing numerous substantially different time-varying speckle-noise patterns at the vertically-elongated image detection elements of the IFD Subsystem during the photo-integration time period thereof, so that these numerous time-varying speckle-noise patterns can be temporally and spatially averaged during the photo-integration time period of the image detection array, thereby reducing the RMS power level of speckle-noise patterns observed at the image detection array.

Another object of the present invention is to provide a PLIIM-based system embodying an speckle-pattern noise reduction subsystem, comprising (i) an image formation and detection (IFD) module mounted on an optical bench and having a linear (1D) image sensor with vertically-elongated image detection elements characterized by a large height-to-width (H/W) aspect ratio, (ii) a pair of planar laser illumination modules (PLIMs) mounted on the optical bench on opposite sides of the IFD module, and (iii) a hybrid-type PLIB modulation mechanism arranged with each PLIM, and employing a micro-oscillating spatial intensity modulation array, a stationary cylindrical lens array, and a micro-oscillating PLIB reflection element configured together as an optical assembly as shown, for the purpose of producing a spatial intensity modulated PLIB while micro-oscillating the PLIB transversely along the direction orthogonal to its planar extent, so that during illumination operations, the PLIB transmitted from each PLIM is spatial phase modulated along the planar extent thereof during micro-oscillation along the direction orthogonal thereto, thereby producing numerous substantially different time-varying speckle-noise patterns at the vertically-elongated image detection elements of the IFD Subsystem during the photo-integration time period thereof, so that these numerous time-varying speckle-noise patterns can be temporally and spatially averaged during the photo-integration time period of the image detection array, thereby reducing the RMS power level of speckle-noise patterns observed at the image detection array.

Another object of the present invention is to provide a based hand-supportable linear imager which contains within its housing, a PLIIM-based image capture and processing engine comprising a dual-VLD PLIA and a 1-D (i.e. linear) image detection array with vertically-elongated image detection elements and configured within an optical assembly that operates in accordance with the first generalized method of speckle-pattern noise reduction of the present invention, and which also has integrated with its housing, a LCD display panel for displaying images captured by said engine and information provided by a host computer system or other information supplying device, and a manual data entry keypad for manually entering data into the imager during diverse types of information-related transactions supported by the PLIIM-based hand-supportable imager.

Another object of the present invention is to provide a manually-activated PLIIM-based hand-supportable linear imager configured with (i) a linear-type image formation and detection (IFD) module having a linear image detection array with vertically-elongated image detection elements and fixed focal length/fixed focal distance image formation optics, (ii) a manually-actuated trigger switch for manually activating the planar laser illumination arrays (driven by a set of VLD driver circuits), the linear-type image formation and detection (IFD) module, the image frame grabber, the image data buffer, and the image processing computer, via the camera control computer, upon manual activation of the trigger switch, and capturing images of objects

(i.e. bearing bar code symbols and other graphical indicia) through the fixed focal length/fixed focal distance image formation optics, and (iii) a LCD display panel and a data entry keypad for supporting diverse types of transactions using the PLIIM-based hand-supportable imager.

Another object of the present invention is to provide an automatically-activated PLIIM-based hand-supportable linear imager configured with (i) a linear-type image formation and detection (IFD) module having a linear image detection array with vertically-elongated image detection elements and fixed focal length/fixed focal distance image formation optics, (ii) an IR-based object detection subsystem within its hand-supportable housing for automatically activating upon detection of an object in its IR-based object detection field, the planar laser illumination arrays (driven by a set of VLD driver circuits), the linear-type image formation and detection (IFD) module, as well as the image frame grabber, the image data buffer, and the image processing computer, via the camera control computer, (ii) a manually-activatable switch for enabling transmission of symbol character data to a host computer system upon decoding a bar code symbol within a captured image frame, and (iii) a LCD display panel and a data entry keypad for supporting diverse types of transactions using the PLIIM-based hand-supportable imager.

Another object of the present invention is to provide automatically-activated PLIIM-based hand-supportable linear imager configured with (i) a linear-type image formation and detection (IFD) module having a linear image detection array with vertically-elongated image detection elements and fixed focal length/fixed focal distance image formation optics, (ii) a laser-based object detection subsystem within its hand-supportable housing for automatically activating the planar laser illumination arrays into a full-power mode of operation, the linear-type image formation and detection (IFD) module, the image frame grabber, the image data buffer, and the image processing computer, via the camera control computer, upon automatic detection of an object in its laser-based object detection field, (iii) a manually-activatable switch for enabling transmission of symbol character data to a host computer system upon decoding a bar code symbol within a captured image frame; and (iv) a LCD display panel and a data entry keypad for supporting diverse types of transactions using the PLIIM-based hand-supportable imager.

Another object of the present invention is to provide an automatically-activated PLIIM-based hand-supportable linear imager configured with (i) a linear-type image formation and detection (IFD) module having a linear image detection array with vertically-elongated image detection elements and fixed focal length/fixed focal distance image formation optics, (ii) an ambient-light driven object detection subsystem within its hand-supportable housing for automatically activating the planar laser illumination arrays (driven by a set of VLD driver circuits), the linear-type image formation and detection (IFD) module, the image frame grabber,

the image data buffer, and the image processing computer, via the camera control computer, upon automatic detection of an object via ambient-light detected by object detection field enabled by the image sensor within the IFD module, (iii) a manually-activatable switch for enabling transmission of symbol character data to a host computer system upon decoding a bar code symbol within a captured image frame, and (iv) a LCD display panel and a data entry keypad for supporting diverse types of transactions using the PLIIM-based hand-supportable imager.

Another object of the present invention is to provide an automatically-activated PLIIM-based hand-supportable linear imager configured with (i) a linear-type image formation and detection (IFD) module having a linear image detection array with vertically-elongated image detection elements and fixed focal length/fixed focal distance image formation optics, (ii) an automatic bar code symbol detection subsystem within its hand-supportable housing for automatically activating the image processing computer for decode-processing upon automatic detection of an bar code symbol within its bar code symbol detection field enabled by the image sensor within the IFD module, (iii) a manually-activatable switch for enabling transmission of symbol character data to a host computer system upon decoding a bar code symbol within a captured image frame, and (iv) a LCD display panel and a data entry keypad for supporting diverse types of transactions using the PLIIM-based hand-supportable imager.

Another object of the present invention is to provide a manually-activated PLIIM-based hand-supportable linear imager configured with (i) a linear-type image formation and detection (IFD) module having a linear image detection array with vertically-elongated image detection elements and fixed focal length/variable focal distance image formation optics, (ii) a manually-actuated trigger switch for manually activating the planar laser illumination arrays (driven by a set of VLD driver circuits), the linear-type image formation and detection (IFD) module, the image frame grabber, the image data buffer, and the image processing computer, via the camera control computer, upon manual activation of the trigger switch, and capturing images of objects (i.e. bearing bar code symbols and other graphical indicia) through the fixed focal length/fixed focal distance image formation optics, and (iii) a LCD display panel and a data entry keypad for supporting diverse types of transactions using the PLIIM-based hand-supportable imager.

Another object of the present invention is to provide an automatically-activated PLIIM-based hand-supportable linear imager configured with (i) a linear-type image formation and detection (IFD) module having a linear image detection array with vertically-elongated image detection elements and fixed focal length/variable focal distance image formation optics, (ii) an IR-based object detection subsystem within its hand-supportable housing for automatically activating upon detection of an object in its IR-based object detection field, the planar laser illumination arrays (driven by a set of VLD driver circuits), the linear-type image formation and

detection (IFD) module, as well as the image frame grabber, the image data buffer, and the image processing computer, via the camera control computer, (ii) a manually-activatable switch for enabling transmission of symbol character data to a host computer system upon decoding a bar code symbol within a captured image frame, and (iii) a LCD display panel and a data entry keypad for supporting diverse types of transactions using the PLIIM-based hand-supportable imager.

Another object of the present invention is to provide an automatically-activated PLIIM-based hand-supportable linear imager configured with (i) a linear-type image formation and detection (IFD) module having a linear image detection array with vertically-elongated image detection elements and fixed focal length/variable focal distance image formation optics, (ii) a laser-based object detection subsystem within its hand-supportable housing for automatically activating the planar laser illumination arrays into a full-power mode of operation, the linear-type image formation and detection (IFD) module, the image frame grabber, the image data buffer, and the image processing computer, via the camera control computer, upon automatic detection of an object in its laser-based object detection field, (iii) a manually-activatable switch for enabling transmission of symbol character data to a host computer system upon decoding a bar code symbol within a captured image frame, and (iv) a LCD display panel and a data entry keypad for supporting diverse types of transactions using the PLIIM-based hand-supportable imager.

Another object of the present invention is to provide an automatically-activated PLIIM-based hand-supportable linear imager configured with (i) a linear-type image formation and detection (IFD) module having a linear image detection array with vertically-elongated image detection elements and fixed focal length/variable focal distance image formation optics, (ii) an ambient-light driven object detection subsystem within its hand-supportable housing for automatically activating the planar laser illumination arrays (driven by a set of VLD driver circuits), the linear-type image formation and detection (IFD) module, the image frame grabber, the image data buffer, and the image processing computer, via the camera control computer, upon automatic detection of an object via ambient-light detected by object detection field enabled by the image sensor within the IFD module, and (iii) a manually-activatable switch for enabling transmission of symbol character data to a host computer system upon decoding a bar code symbol within a captured image frame.

Another object of the present invention is to provide an automatically-activated PLIIM-based hand-supportable linear imager configured with (i) a linear-type image formation and detection (IFD) module having a linear image detection array with vertically-elongated image detection elements and fixed focal length/variable focal distance image formation optics, (ii) an automatic bar code symbol detection subsystem within its hand-supportable housing for

automatically activating the image processing computer for decode-processing upon automatic detection of an bar code symbol within its bar code symbol detection field enabled by the image sensor within the IFD module, (iii) a manually-activatable switch for enabling transmission of symbol character data to a host computer system upon decoding a bar code symbol within a captured image frame, and (iv) a LCD display panel and a data entry keypad for supporting diverse types of transactions using the PLIIM-based hand-supportable imager.

Another object of the present invention is to provide a manually-activated PLIIM-based hand-supportable linear imager configured with (i) a linear-type image formation and detection (IFD) module having a linear image detection array with vertically-elongated image detection elements and variable focal length/variable focal distance image formation optics, (ii) a manually-actuated trigger switch for manually activating the planar laser illumination arrays (driven by a set of VLD driver circuits), the linear-type image formation and detection (IFD) module, the image frame grabber, the image data buffer, and the image processing computer, via the camera control computer, upon manual activation of the trigger switch, and capturing images of objects (i.e. bearing bar code symbols and other graphical indicia) through the fixed focal length/fixed focal distance image formation optics, and (iii) a LCD display panel and a data entry keypad for supporting diverse types of transactions using the PLIIM-based hand-supportable imager.

Another object of the present invention is to provide an automatically-activated PLIIM-based hand-supportable linear imager configured with (i) a linear-type image formation and detection (IFD) module having a linear image detection array with vertically-elongated image detection elements and variable focal length/variable focal distance image formation optics, (ii) an IR-based object detection subsystem within its hand-supportable housing for automatically activating upon detection of an object in its IR-based object detection field, the planar laser illumination arrays (driven by a set of VLD driver circuits), the linear-type image formation and detection (IFD) module, as well as the image frame grabber, the image data buffer, and the image processing computer, via the camera control computer, (ii) a manually-activatable switch for enabling transmission of symbol character data to a host computer system upon decoding a bar code symbol within a captured image frame, and (iii) a LCD display panel and a data entry keypad for supporting diverse types of transactions using the PLIIM-based hand-supportable imager.

Another object of the present invention is to provide an automatically-activated PLIIM-based hand-supportable linear imager configured with (i) a linear-type image formation and detection (IFD) module having a linear image detection array with vertically-elongated image detection elements and variable focal length/variable focal distance image formation optics, (ii) a laser-based object detection subsystem within its hand-supportable housing for automatically

activating the planar laser illumination arrays into a full-power mode of operation, the linear-type image formation and detection (IFD) module, the image frame grabber, the image data buffer, and the image processing computer, via the camera control computer, upon automatic detection of an object in its laser-based object detection field, (iii) a manually-activatable switch for enabling transmission of symbol character data to a host computer system upon decoding a bar code symbol within a captured image frame, and (iv) a LCD display panel and a data entry keypad for supporting diverse types of transactions using the PLIIM-based hand-supportable imager.

Another object of the present invention is to provide an automatically-activated PLIIM-based hand-supportable linear imager configured with (i) a linear-type image formation and detection (IFD) module having a linear image detection array with vertically-elongated image detection elements and variable focal length/variable focal distance image formation optics, (ii) an ambient-light driven object detection subsystem within its hand-supportable housing for automatically activating the planar laser illumination arrays (driven by a set of VLD driver circuits), the linear-type image formation and detection (IFD) module, the image frame grabber, the image data buffer, and the image processing computer, via the camera control computer, upon automatic detection of an object via ambient-light detected by object detection field enabled by the image sensor within the IFD module, (iii) a manually-activatable switch for enabling transmission of symbol character data to a host computer system upon decoding a bar code symbol within a captured image frame, and (iv) a LCD display panel and a data entry keypad for supporting diverse types of transactions using the PLIIM-based hand-supportable imager.

Another object of the present invention is to provide an automatically-activated PLIIM-based hand-supportable linear imager configured with (i) a linear-type image formation and detection (IFD) module having a linear image detection array with vertically-elongated image detection elements and variable focal length/variable focal distance image formation optics, (ii) an automatic bar code symbol detection subsystem within its hand-supportable housing for automatically activating the image processing computer for decode-processing upon automatic detection of an bar code symbol within its bar code symbol detection field enabled by the image sensor within the IFD module, (iii) a manually-activatable switch for enabling transmission of symbol character data to a host computer system upon decoding a bar code symbol within a captured image frame, and (iv) a LCD display panel and a data entry keypad for supporting diverse types of transactions using the PLIIM-based hand-supportable imager.

Another object of the present invention is to provide a PLIIM-based image capture and processing engine for use in a hand-supportable imager.

Another object of the present invention is to provide a PLIIM-based image capture and processing engine for use in the hand-supportable imagers, presentation scanners, and the like, comprising PLIAs, and IFD (i.e. camera) subsystem and associated optical components mounted on an optical-bench/multi-layer PC board, contained between the upper and lower portions of the engine housing.

Another object of the present invention is to provide a PLIIM-based hand-supportable linear imager which contains within its housing, a PLIIM-based image capture and processing engine comprising a dual-VLD PLIA and a linear image detection array with vertically-elongated image detection elements configured within an optical assembly that provides a despeckling mechanism which operates in accordance with the first generalized method of speckle-pattern noise reduction.

Another object of the present invention is to provide a PLIIM-based hand-supportable linear imager which contains within its housing, a PLIIM-based image capture and processing engine comprising a dual-VLD PLIA and a linear image detection array having vertically-elongated image detection elements configured within an optical assembly which provides a despeckling mechanism that operates in accordance with the first generalized method of speckle-pattern noise reduction.

Another object of the present invention is to provide a PLIIM-based image capture and processing engine for use in the hand-supportable imagers, presentation scanners, and the like, comprising a dual-VLD PLIA and a linear image detection array having vertically-elongated image detection elements configured within an optical assembly which employs high-resolution deformable mirror (DM) structure which provides a despeckling mechanism that operates in accordance with the first generalized method of speckle-pattern noise reduction.

Another object of the present invention is to provide a PLIIM-based image capture and processing engine for use in the hand-supportable imagers, presentation scanners, and the like, comprising a dual-VLD PLIA and a linear image detection array having vertically-elongated image detection elements configured within an optical assembly that employs a high-resolution phase-only LCD-based phase modulation panel which provides a despeckling mechanism that operates in accordance with the first generalized method of speckle-pattern noise reduction.

Another object of the present invention is to provide PLIIM-based image capture and processing engine for use in the hand-supportable imagers, presentation scanners, and the like, comprising a dual-VLD PLIA and a linear image detection array having vertically-elongated image detection elements configured within an optical assembly that employs a rotating multi-faceted cylindrical lens array structure which provides a despeckling mechanism that operates in accordance with the first generalized method of speckle-pattern noise reduction.

Another object of the present invention is to provide a PLIIM-based image capture and processing engine for use in the hand-supportable imagers, presentation scanners, and the like, comprising a dual-VLD PLIA and a linear image detection array having vertically-elongated image detection elements configured within an optical assembly that employs a high-speed temporal intensity modulation panel (i.e. optical shutter) which provides a despeckling mechanism that operates in accordance with the second generalized method of speckle-pattern noise reduction.

Another object of the present invention is to provide a PLIIM-based image capture and processing engine for use in the hand-supportable imagers, presentation scanners, and the like, comprising a dual-VLD PLIA and a linear image detection array having vertically-elongated image detection elements configured within an optical assembly that employs visible mode-locked laser diode (MLLDs) which provide a despeckling mechanism that operates in accordance with the second method generalized method of speckle-pattern noise reduction.

Another object of the present invention is to provide a PLIIM-based image capture and processing engine for use in the hand-supportable imagers, presentation scanners, and the like, comprising a dual-VLD PLIA and a linear image detection array having vertically-elongated image detection elements configured within an optical assembly that employs an optically-reflective temporal phase modulating structure (i.e. etalon) which provides a despeckling mechanism that operates in accordance with the third generalized method of speckle-pattern noise reduction.

Another object of the present invention is to provide a PLIIM-based image capture and processing engine for use in the hand-supportable imagers, presentation scanners, and the like, comprising a dual-VLD PLIA and a linear image detection array having vertically-elongated image detection elements configured within an optical assembly that employs a pair of reciprocating spatial intensity modulation panels which provide a despeckling mechanism that operates in accordance with the fifth method generalized method of speckle-pattern noise reduction.

Another object of the present invention is to provide a PLIIM-based image capture and processing engine for use in the hand-supportable imagers, presentation scanners, and the like, comprising a dual-VLD PLIA and a linear image detection array having vertically-elongated image detection elements configured within an optical assembly that employs spatial intensity modulation aperture which provides a despeckling mechanism that operates in accordance with the sixth method generalized method of speckle-pattern noise reduction.

Another object of the present invention is to provide a PLIIM-based image capture and processing engine for use in the hand-supportable imagers, presentation scanners, and the like, comprising a dual-VLD PLIA and a linear image detection array having vertically-elongated

image detection elements configured within an optical assembly that employs a temporal intensity modulation aperture which provides a despeckling mechanism that operates in accordance with the seventh generalized method of speckle-pattern noise reduction.

Another object of the present invention is to provide a hand-supportable imager having a housing containing a PLIIM-based image capture and processing engine comprising a dual-VLD PLIA, and a 2-D (area-type) image detection array configured within an optical assembly that employs a micro-oscillating cylindrical lens array which provides a despeckling mechanism that operates in accordance with the first generalized method of speckle-pattern noise reduction, and which also has integrated with its housing, a LCD display panel for displaying images captured by said engine and information provided by a host computer system or other information supplying device, and a manual data entry keypad for manually entering data into the imager during diverse types of information-related transactions supported by the PLIIM-based hand-supportable imager.

Another object of the present invention is to provide a hand-supportable imager having a housing containing a PLIIM-based image capture and processing engine comprising a dual-VLD PLIA and an area image detection array configured within an optical assembly which employs a micro-oscillating light reflective element that provides a despeckling mechanism that operates in accordance with the first generalized method of speckle-pattern noise reduction, and which also has integrated with its housing, a LCD display panel for displaying images captured by said engine and information provided by a host computer system or other information supplying device, and a manual data entry keypad for manually entering data into the imager during diverse types of information-related transactions supported by the PLIIM-based hand-supportable imager.

Another object of the present invention is to provide a hand-supportable imager having a housing containing a PLIIM-based image capture and processing engine comprising a dual-VLD PLIA and a 2-D image detection array configured within an optical assembly that employs an acousto-electric Bragg cell structure which provides a despeckling mechanism that operates in accordance with the first generalized method of speckle-pattern noise reduction, and which also has integrated with its housing, a LCD display panel for displaying images captured by said engine and information provided by a host computer system or other information supplying device, and a manual data entry keypad for manually entering data into the imager during diverse types of information-related transactions supported by the PLIIM-based hand-supportable imager.

Another object of the present invention is to provide a hand-supportable imager having a housing containing a PLIIM-based image capture and processing engine comprising a dual-VLD PLIA and a 2-D image detection array configured within an optical assembly that

employs a high spatial-resolution piezo-electric driven deformable mirror (DM) structure which provides a despeckling mechanism that operates in accordance with the first generalized method of speckle-pattern noise reduction, and which also has integrated with its housing, a LCD display panel for displaying images captured by said engine and information provided by a host computer system or other information supplying device, and a manual data entry keypad for manually entering data into the imager during diverse types of information-related transactions supported by the PLIIM-based hand-supportable imager.

Another object of the present invention is to provide a hand-supportable imager having a housing containing a PLIIM-based image capture and processing engine comprising a dual-VLD PLIA and a 2-D image detection array configured within an optical assembly that employs a spatial-only liquid crystal display (PO-LCD) type spatial phase modulation panel which provides a despeckling mechanism that operates in accordance with the first generalized method of speckle-pattern noise reduction, and which also has integrated with its housing, a LCD display panel for displaying images captured by said engine and information provided by a host computer system or other information supplying device, and a manual data entry keypad for manually entering data into the imager during diverse types of information-related transactions supported by the PLIIM-based hand-supportable imager.

Another object of the present invention is to provide a hand-supportable imager having a housing containing a PLIIM-based image capture and processing engine comprising a dual-VLD PLIA and a 2-D image detection array configured within an optical assembly that employs a visible mode locked laser diode (MLLD) which provides a despeckling mechanism that operates in accordance with the second generalized method of speckle-pattern noise reduction, and which also has integrated with its housing, a LCD display panel for displaying images captured by said engine and information provided by a host computer system or other information supplying device, and a manual data entry keypad for manually entering data into the imager during diverse types of information-related transactions supported by the PLIIM-based hand-supportable imager.

Another object of the present invention is to provide a hand-supportable imager having a housing containing a PLIIM-based image capture and processing engine comprising a dual-VLD PLIA and a 2-D image detection array configured within an optical assembly that employs an electrically-passive optically-reflective cavity (i.e. etalon) which provides a despeckling mechanism that operates in accordance with the third method generalized method of speckle-pattern noise reduction, and which also has integrated with its housing, a LCD display panel for displaying images captured by said engine and information provided by a host computer system or other information supplying device, and a manual data entry keypad

for manually entering data into the imager during diverse types of information-related transactions supported by the PLIIM-based hand-supportable imager.

Another object of the present invention is to provide a hand-supportable imager having a housing containing a PLIIM-based image capture and processing engine comprising a dual-VLD PLIA and a 2-D image detection array configured within an optical assembly that employs a pair of micro-oscillating spatial intensity modulation panels which provide a despeckling mechanism that operates in accordance with the fifth method generalized method of speckle-pattern noise reduction, and which also has integrated with its housing, a LCD display panel for displaying images captured by said engine and information provided by a host computer system or other information supplying device, and a manual data entry keypad for manually entering data into the imager during diverse types of information-related transactions supported by the PLIIM-based hand-supportable imager.

Another object of the present invention is to provide a hand-supportable imager having a housing containing a PLIIM-based image capture and processing engine comprising a dual-VLD PLIA and a 2-D image detection array configured within an optical assembly that employs a electro-optical or mechanically rotating aperture (i.e. iris) disposed before the entrance pupil of the IFD module, which provides a despeckling mechanism that operates in accordance with the sixth method generalized method of speckle-pattern noise reduction, and which also has integrated with its housing, a LCD display panel for displaying images captured by said engine and information provided by a host computer system or other information supplying device, and a manual data entry keypad for manually entering data into the imager during diverse types of information-related transactions supported by the PLIIM-based hand-supportable imager.

Another object of the present invention is to provide a hand-supportable imager having a housing containing a PLIIM-based image capture and processing engine comprising a dual-VLD PLIA and a 2-D image detection array configured within an optical assembly that employs a high-speed electro-optical shutter disposed before the entrance pupil of the IFD module, which provides a despeckling mechanism that operates in accordance with the seventh generalized method of speckle-pattern noise reduction, and which also has integrated with its housing, a LCD display panel for displaying images captured by said engine and information provided by a host computer system or other information supplying device, and a manual data entry keypad for manually entering data into the imager during diverse types of information-related transactions supported by the PLIIM-based hand-supportable imager.

Another object of the present invention is to provide a manually-activated PLIIM-based hand-supportable linear imager configured with (i) a linear-type (i.e. 1D) image formation and detection (IFD) module having a fixed focal length/fixed focal distance image formation optics

with a field of view (FOV), (ii) a manually-actuated trigger switch for manually activating the planar laser illumination array (to producing a PLIB in coplanar arrangement with said FOV), the linear-type image formation and detection (IFD) module, the image frame grabber, the image data buffer, and the image processing computer, via the camera control computer, upon response to the manual activation of the trigger switch, and capturing images of objects (i.e. bearing bar code symbols and other graphical indicia) through the fixed focal length/fixed focal distance image formation optics, and (iii) a LCD display panel and a data entry keypad for supporting diverse types of transactions using the PLIIM-based hand-supportable imager.

Another object of the present invention is to provide an automatically-activated PLIIM-based hand-supportable linear imager configured with (i) a linear-type image formation and detection (IFD) module having a fixed focal length/fixed focal distance image formation optics with a field of view (FOV), (ii) an IR-based object detection subsystem within its hand-supportable housing for automatically activating upon detection of an object in its IR-based object detection field, the planar laser illumination array (to produce a PLIB in coplanar arrangement with said FOV), the linear-type image formation and detection (IFD) module, as well as the image frame grabber, the image data buffer, and the image processing computer, via the camera control computer, (ii) a manually-activatable switch for enabling transmission of symbol character data to a host computer system upon decoding a bar code symbol within a captured image frame, and (iii) a LCD display panel and a data entry keypad for supporting diverse types of transactions using the PLIIM-based hand-supportable imager.

Another object of the present invention is to provide an automatically-activated PLIIM-based hand-supportable linear imager configured with (i) a linear-type image formation and detection (IFD) module having a fixed focal length/fixed focal distance image formation optics with a field of view (FOV), (ii) a laser-based object detection subsystem within its hand-supportable housing for automatically activating the planar laser illumination array into a full-power mode of operation (to produce a PLIB in coplanar arrangement with said FOV), the linear-type image formation and detection (IFD) module, the image frame grabber, the image data buffer, and the image processing computer, via the camera control computer, in response to the automatic detection of an object in its laser-based object detection field, (iii) a manually-activatable switch for enabling transmission of symbol character data to a host computer system upon decoding a bar code symbol within a captured image frame; and (iv) a LCD display panel and a data entry keypad for supporting diverse types of transactions using the PLIIM-based hand-supportable imager.

Another object of the present invention is to provide an automatically-activated PLIIM-based hand-supportable linear imager shown configured with (i) a linear-type image formation and detection (IFD) module having a fixed focal length/fixed focal distance image formation optics

optics with a field of view (FOV), (ii) an ambient-light driven object detection subsystem within its hand-supportable housing for automatically activating the planar laser illumination array (to produce a PLIB in coplanar arrangement with said FOV), the area-type image formation and detection (IFD) module, the image frame grabber, the image data buffer, and the image processing computer, via the camera control computer, upon automatic detection of an object via ambient-light detected by object detection field enabled by the image sensor within the IFD module, (iii) a manually-activatable switch for enabling transmission of symbol character data to a host computer system in response to decoding a bar code symbol within a captured image frame, and (iv) a LCD display panel and a data entry keypad for supporting diverse types of transactions using the PLIIM-based hand-supportable imager.

Another object of the present invention is to provide an automatically-activated PLIIM-based hand-supportable linear imager configured with (i) a linear-type image formation and detection (IFD) module having a fixed focal length/fixed focal distance image formation optics with a field of view (FOV), (ii) an automatic bar code symbol detection subsystem within its hand-supportable housing for automatically activating the planar laser illumination array (to produce a PLIB in coplanar arrangement with said FOV), the image processing computer for decode-processing in response to the automatic detection of an bar code symbol within its bar code symbol detection field enabled by the image sensor within the IFD module, (iii) a manually-activatable switch for enabling transmission of symbol character data to a host computer system in response to decoding a bar code symbol within a captured image frame, and (iv) a LCD display panel and a data entry keypad for supporting diverse types of transactions using the PLIIM-based hand-supportable imager.

Another object of the present invention is to provide a manually-activated PLIIM-based hand-supportable linear imager configured with (i) a linear -type image formation and detection (IFD) module having a fixed focal length/variable focal distance image formation optics with a field of view (FOV), (ii) a manually-actuated trigger switch for manually activating the planar laser illumination (to produce a planar laser illumination beam (PLIB) in coplanar arrangement with said FOV), the linear-type image formation and detection (IFD) module, the image frame grabber, the image data buffer, and the image processing computer, via the camera control computer, in response to the manual activation of the trigger switch, and capturing images of objects (i.e. bearing bar code symbols and other graphical indicia) through the fixed focal length/fixed focal distance image formation optics, and (iii) a LCD display panel and a data entry keypad for supporting diverse types of transactions using the PLIIM-based hand-supportable imager.

Another object of the present invention is to provide an automatically-activated PLIIM-based hand-supportable linear imager configured with (i) a linear-type image formation and

detection (IFD) module having a fixed focal length/variable focal distance image formation optics with a field of view (FOV), (ii) an IR-based object detection subsystem within its hand-supportable housing for automatically activating in response to the detection of an object in its IR-based object detection field, the planar laser illumination array (to produce a PLIB in coplanar arrangement with said FOV), the linear-type image formation and detection (IFD) module, as well as the image frame grabber, the image data buffer, and the image processing computer, via the camera control computer, (ii) a manually-activatable switch for enabling transmission of symbol character data to a host computer system in response to decoding a bar code symbol within a captured image frame, and (iii) a LCD display panel and a data entry keypad for supporting diverse types of transactions using the PLIIM-based hand-supportable imager.

Another object of the present invention is to provide an automatically-activated PLIIM-based hand-supportable linear imager configured with (i) a linear-type image formation and detection (IFD) module having a fixed focal length/variable focal distance image formation optics with a field of view (FOV), (ii) a laser-based object detection subsystem within its hand-supportable housing for automatically activating the planar laser illumination array into a full-power mode of operation (to produce a PLIB in coplanar arrangement with said FOV), the a linear-type image formation and detection (IFD) module, the image frame grabber, the image data buffer, and the image processing computer, via the camera control computer, upon automatic detection of an object in its laser-based object detection field, (iii) a manually-activatable switch for enabling transmission of symbol character data to a host computer system in response to the decoding a bar code symbol within a captured image frame, and (iv) a LCD display panel and a data entry keypad for supporting diverse types of transactions using the PLIIM-based hand-supportable imager.

Another object of the present invention is to provide an automatically-activated PLIIM-based hand-supportable linear imager configured with (i) a linear-type image formation and detection (IFD) module having a fixed focal length/variable focal distance image formation optics with a field of FOV, (ii) an ambient-light driven object detection subsystem within its hand-supportable housing for automatically activating the planar laser illumination array (to produce a PLIB in coplanar arrangement with said FOV), the area-type image formation and detection (IFD) module, the image frame grabber, the image data buffer, and the image processing computer, via the camera control computer, in response to the automatic detection of an object via ambient-light detected by object detection field enabled by the image sensor within the IFD module, and (iii) a manually-activatable switch for enabling transmission of symbol character data to a host computer system upon decoding a bar code symbol within a captured image frame.

Another object of the present invention is to provide an automatically-activated PLIIM-based hand-supportable linear imager configured with (i) a linear -type image formation and detection (IFD) module having a fixed focal length/variable focal distance image formation optics with a field of view (FOV), (ii) an automatic bar code symbol detection subsystem within its hand-supportable housing for automatically activating the planar laser illumination array (to produce a PLIB in coplanar arrangement with said FOV), the image processing computer for decode-processing in response to the automatic detection of an bar code symbol within its bar code symbol detection field enabled by the image sensor within the IFD module, (iii) a manually-activatable switch for enabling transmission of symbol character data to a host computer system in response to decoding a bar code symbol within a captured image frame, and (iv) a LCD display panel and a data entry keypad for supporting diverse types of transactions using the PLIIM-based hand-supportable imager.

Another object of the present invention is to provide a manually-activated PLIIM-based hand-supportable linear imager configured with (i) a linear-type image formation and detection (IFD) module having a variable focal length/variable focal distance image formation optics with a field of FOV, (ii) a manually-actuated trigger switch for manually activating the planar laser illumination array (to produce a PLIB in coplanar arrangement with said FOV), the linear-type image formation and detection (IFD) module, the image frame grabber, the image data buffer, and the image processing computer, via the camera control computer, in response to the manual activation of the trigger switch, and capturing images of objects (i.e. bearing bar code symbols and other graphical indicia) through the fixed focal length/fixed focal distance image formation optics, and (iii) a LCD display panel and a data entry keypad for supporting diverse types of transactions using the PLIIM-based hand-supportable imager.

Another object of the present invention is to provide an automatically-activated PLIIM-based hand-supportable linear imager configured with (i) a linear-type image formation and detection (IFD) module having a variable focal length/variable focal distance image formation optics with a field of view (FOV), (ii) an IR-based object detection subsystem within its hand-supportable housing for automatically activating in response to the detection of an object in its IR-based object detection field, the planar laser illumination array (to produce a PLIB in coplanar arrangement with said FOV), the linear-type image formation and detection (IFD) module, as well as the image frame grabber, the image data buffer, and the image processing computer, via the camera control computer, (ii) a manually-activatable switch for enabling transmission of symbol character data to a host computer system in response to decoding a bar code symbol within a captured image frame, and (iii) a LCD display panel and a data entry keypad for supporting diverse types of transactions using the PLIIM-based hand-supportable imager.

Another object of the present invention is to provide an automatically-activated PLIIM-based hand-supportable linear imager configured with (i) a linear-type image formation and detection (IFD) module having a variable focal length/variable focal distance image formation optics and a field of view, (ii) a laser-based object detection subsystem within its hand-supportable housing for automatically activating the planar laser illumination array into a full-power mode of operation (to produce a PLIB in coplanar arrangement with said FOV), the linear-type image formation and detection (IFD) module, the image frame grabber, the image data buffer, and the image processing computer, via the camera control computer, in response to the automatic detection of an object in its laser-based object detection field, (iii) a manually-activatable switch for enabling transmission of symbol character data to a host computer system in response to decoding a bar code symbol within a captured image frame, and (iv) a LCD display panel and a data entry keypad for supporting diverse types of transactions using the PLIIM-based hand-supportable imager.

Another object of the present invention is to provide an automatically-activated PLIIM-based hand-supportable linear imager configured with (i) a linear-type image formation and detection (IFD) module having a variable focal length/variable focal distance image formation optics with a field of view (FOV), (ii) an ambient-light driven object detection subsystem within its hand-supportable housing for automatically activating the planar laser illumination array (to produce a PLIB in coplanar arrangement with said FOV) the linear-type image formation and detection (IFD) module, the image frame grabber, the image data buffer, and the image processing computer, via the camera control computer, in response to the automatic detection of an object via ambient-light detected by object detection field enabled by the image sensor within the IFD module, (iii) a manually-activatable switch for enabling transmission of symbol character data to a host computer system in response to decoding a bar code symbol within a captured image frame, and (iv) a LCD display panel and a data entry keypad for supporting diverse types of transactions using the PLIIM-based hand-supportable imager.

Another object of the present invention is to provide an automatically-activated PLIIM-based hand-supportable linear imager configured with (i) a linear-type image formation and detection (IFD) module having a variable focal length/variable focal distance image formation optics with a field of view (FOV), (ii) an automatic bar code symbol detection subsystem within its hand-supportable housing for automatically activating the planar laser illumination array (to produce a PLIB in coplanar arrangement with said FOV) the linear-type image formation and detection (IFD) module, the image frame grabber, the image data buffer, the image processing computer for decode-processing in response to the automatic detection of an bar code symbol within its bar code symbol detection field enabled by the image sensor within the IFD module, (iii) a manually-activatable switch for enabling transmission of symbol character data to a host

computer system in response to decoding a bar code symbol within a captured image frame, and (iv) a LCD display panel and a data entry keypad for supporting diverse types of transactions using the PLIIM-based hand-supportable imager.

Another object of the present invention is to provide a manually-activated PLIIM-based hand-supportable area imager configured with (i) an area-type (i.e. 2D) image formation and detection (IFD) module having a fixed focal length/fixed focal distance image formation optics with a field of field of view (FOV), (ii) a manually-actuated trigger switch for manually activating the planar laser illumination array (to produce a PLIB in coplanar arrangement with said FOV), the area-type image formation and detection (IFD) module, the image frame grabber, the image data buffer, and the image processing computer, via the camera control computer, in response to the manual activation of the trigger switch, and capturing images of objects (i.e. bearing bar code symbols and other graphical indicia) through the fixed focal length/fixed focal distance image formation optics, and (iii) a LCD display panel and a data entry keypad for supporting diverse types of transactions using the PLIIM-based hand-supportable imager.

Another object of the present invention is to provide an automatically-activated PLIIM-based hand-supportable area imager configured with (i) an area-type image formation and detection (IFD) module having a fixed focal length/fixed focal distance image formation optics with a FOV, (ii) an IR-based object detection subsystem within its hand-supportable housing for automatically activating in response to the detection of an object in its IR-based object detection field, the planar laser illumination array (to produce a PLIB in coplanar arrangement with said FOV), the area-type image formation and detection (IFD) module, as well as the image frame grabber, the image data buffer, and the image processing computer, via the camera control computer, (ii) a manually-activatable switch for enabling transmission of symbol character data to a host computer system in response to decoding a bar code symbol within a captured image frame, and (iii) a LCD display panel and a data entry keypad for supporting diverse types of transactions using the PLIIM-based hand-supportable imager.

Another object of the present invention is to provide an automatically-activated PLIIM-based hand-supportable area imager configured with (i) an area-type image formation and detection (IFD) module having a fixed focal length/fixed focal distance image formation optics with a FOV, (ii) a laser-based object detection subsystem within its hand-supportable housing for automatically activating the planar laser illumination array into a full-power mode of operation (to produce a PLIB in coplanar arrangement with said FOV), the area-type image formation and detection (IFD) module, the image frame grabber, the image data buffer, and the image processing computer, via the camera control computer, in response to the automatic detection of an object in its laser-based object detection field, (iii) a manually-activatable switch for enabling transmission of symbol character data to a host computer system in response to

decoding a bar code symbol within a captured image frame; and (iv) a LCD display panel and a data entry keypad for supporting diverse types of transactions using the PLIIM-based hand-supportable imager.

Another object of the present invention is to provide an automatically-activated PLIIM-based hand-supportable area imager shown configured with (i) a area-type image formation and detection (IFD) module having a fixed focal length/fixed focal distance image formation optics with a FOV, (ii) an ambient-light driven object detection subsystem within its hand-supportable housing for automatically activating the planar laser illumination array (to produce a PLIB in coplanar arrangement with said FOV), the area-type image formation and detection (IFD) module, the image frame grabber, the image data buffer, and the image processing computer, via the camera control computer, in response to the automatic detection of an object via ambient-light detected by object detection field enabled by the image sensor within the IFD module, (iii) a manually-activatable switch for enabling transmission of symbol character data to a host computer system in response to decoding a bar code symbol within a captured image frame, and (iv) a LCD display panel and a data entry keypad for supporting diverse types of transactions using the PLIIM-based hand-supportable imager.

Another object of the present invention is to provide an automatically-activated PLIIM-based hand-supportable area imager configured with (i) an area-type image formation and detection (IFD) module having a fixed focal length/fixed focal distance image formation optics with a FOV, (ii) an automatic bar code symbol detection subsystem within its hand-supportable housing for automatically activating the planar laser illumination array (to produce a PLIB in coplanar arrangement with said FOV), the area-type image formation and detection (IFD) module, the image frame grabber, the image data buffer, and the image processing computer, via the image processing computer for decode-processing upon automatic detection of an bar code symbol within its bar code symbol detection field enabled by the image sensor within the IFD module, (iii) a manually-activatable switch for enabling transmission of symbol character data to a host computer system in response to decoding a bar code symbol within a captured image frame, and (iv) a LCD display panel and a data entry keypad for supporting diverse types of transactions using the PLIIM-based hand-supportable imager.

Another object of the present invention is to provide a manually-activated PLIIM-based hand-supportable area imager configured with (i) an area-type image formation and detection (IFD) module having a fixed focal length/variable focal distance image formation optics with a FOV, (ii) a manually-actuated trigger switch for manually activating the planar laser illumination array (to produce a PLIB in coplanar arrangement with said FOV), the area-type image formation and detection (IFD) module, the image frame grabber, the image data buffer, and the image processing computer, via the camera control computer, upon manual activation

of the trigger switch, and capturing images of objects (i.e. bearing bar code symbols and other graphical indicia) through the fixed focal length/fixed focal distance image formation optics, and (iii) a LCD display panel and a data entry keypad for supporting diverse types of transactions using the PLIIM-based hand-supportable imager.

Another object of the present invention is to provide an automatically-activated PLIIM-based hand-supportable area imager configured with (i) an area-type image formation and detection (IFD) module having a fixed focal length/variable focal distance image formation optics with a FOV, (ii) an IR-based object detection subsystem within its hand-supportable housing for automatically activating, in response to the detection of an object in its IR-based object detection field, the planar laser illumination array (to produce a PLIB in coplanar arrangement with said FOV), the area-type image formation and detection (IFD) module, the image frame grabber, the image data buffer, and the image processing computer, via the camera control computer, (ii) a manually-activatable switch for enabling transmission of symbol character data to a host computer system in response to decoding a bar code symbol within a captured image frame, and (iii) a LCD display panel and a data entry keypad for supporting diverse types of transactions using the PLIIM-based hand-supportable imager.

Another object of the present invention is to provide an automatically-activated PLIIM-based hand-supportable area imager configured with (i) an area-type image formation and detection (IFD) module having a fixed focal length/variable focal distance image formation optics with a FOV, (ii) a laser-based object detection subsystem within its hand-supportable housing for automatically activating the planar laser illumination array into a full-power mode of operation (to produce a PLIB in coplanar arrangement with said FOV), the area-type image formation and detection (IFD) module, the image frame grabber, the image data buffer, and the image processing computer, via, the camera control computer, in response to the automatic detection of an object in its laser-based object detection field, (iii) a manually-activatable switch for enabling transmission of symbol character data to a host computer system in response to decoding a bar code symbol within a captured image frame, and (iv) a LCD display panel and a data entry keypad for supporting diverse types of transactions using the PLIIM-based hand-supportable imager.

Another object of the present invention is to provide an automatically-activated PLIIM-based hand-supportable area imager configured with (i) an area-type image formation and detection (IFD) module having a fixed focal length/variable focal distance image formation optics with a FOV, (ii) an ambient-light driven object detection subsystem within its hand-supportable housing for automatically activating the planar laser illumination array (to produce a PLIB in coplanar arrangement with said FOV), the area-type image formation and detection (IFD) module, the image frame grabber, the image data buffer, and the image processing

computer, via the camera control computer, upon automatic detection of an object via ambient-light detected by object detection field enabled by the image sensor within the IFD module, and (iii) a manually-activatable switch for enabling transmission of symbol character data to a host computer system upon decoding a bar code symbol within a captured image frame.

Another object of the present invention is to provide an automatically-activated PLIIM-based hand-supportable area imager configured with (i) an area-type image formation and detection (IFD) module having a fixed focal length/variable focal distance image formation optics with a FOV, (ii) an automatic bar code symbol detection subsystem within its hand-supportable housing for automatically activating the planar laser illumination array (to produce a PLIB in coplanar arrangement with said FOV), the area-type image formation and detection (IFD) module, the image frame grabber, the image data buffer, and the image processing computer for decode-processing of image data in response to the automatic detection of an bar code symbol within its bar code symbol detection field enabled by the image sensor within the IFD module, (iii) a manually-activatable switch for enabling transmission of symbol character data to a host computer system in response to decoding a bar code symbol within a captured image frame, and (iv) a LCD display panel and a data entry keypad for supporting diverse types of transactions using the PLIIM-based hand-supportable imager.

Another object of the present invention is to provide a manually-activated PLIIM-based hand-supportable area imager configured with (i) an area-type image formation and detection (IFD) module having a variable focal length/variable focal distance image formation optics with a FOV, (ii) a manually-actuated trigger switch for manually activating the planar laser illumination array (to produce a PLIB in coplanar arrangement with said FOV), the area-type image formation and detection (IFD) module, the image frame grabber, the image data buffer, and the image processing computer, via the camera control computer, in response to manual activation of the trigger switch, and capturing images of objects (i.e. bearing bar code symbols and other graphical indicia) through the fixed focal length/fixed focal distance image formation optics, and (iii) a LCD display panel and a data entry keypad for supporting diverse types of transactions using the PLIIM-based hand-supportable imager.

Another object of the present invention is to provide an automatically-activated PLIIM-based hand-supportable area imager configured with (i) an area-type image formation and detection (IFD) module having a variable focal length/variable focal distance image formation optics with a FOV, (ii) an IR-based object detection subsystem within its hand-supportable housing for automatically activating in response to the detection of an object in its IR-based object detection field, the planar laser illumination arrays (to produce a PLIB in coplanar arrangement with said FOV), the area-type image formation and detection (IFD) module, as well as the image frame grabber, the image data buffer, and the image processing computer, via

the camera control computer, (ii) a manually-activatable switch for enabling transmission of symbol character data to a host computer system in response to decoding a bar code symbol within a captured image frame, and (iii) a LCD display panel and a data entry keypad for supporting diverse types of transactions using the PLIIM-based hand-supportable imager.

Another object of the present invention is to provide an automatically-activated PLIIM-based hand-supportable area imager configured with (i) an area-type image formation and detection (IFD) module having a variable focal length/variable focal distance image formation optics with a FOV, (ii) a laser-based object detection subsystem within its hand-supportable housing for automatically activating the planar laser illumination array into a full-power mode of operation (to produce a PLIB in coplanar arrangement with said FOV), the area-type image formation and detection (IFD) module, the image frame grabber, the image data buffer, and the image processing computer, via the camera control computer, in response to the automatic detection of an object in its laser-based object detection field, (iii) a manually-activatable switch for enabling transmission of symbol character data to a host computer system in response to decoding a bar code symbol within a captured image frame, and (iv) a LCD display panel and a data entry keypad for supporting diverse types of transactions using the PLIIM-based hand-supportable imager.

Another object of the present invention is to provide an automatically-activated PLIIM-based hand-supportable area imager configured with (i) an area-type image formation and detection (IFD) module having a variable focal length/variable focal distance image formation optics with a FOV, (ii) an ambient-light driven object detection subsystem within its hand-supportable housing for automatically activating the planar laser illumination array (to produce a PLIB in coplanar arrangement with said FOV), the area-type image formation and detection (IFD) module, the image frame grabber, the image data buffer, and the image processing computer, via the camera control computer, in response to the automatic detection of an object via ambient-light detected by object detection field enabled by the image sensor within the IFD module, (iii) a manually-activatable switch for enabling transmission of symbol character data to a host computer system in response to the decoding a bar code symbol within a captured image frame, and (iv) a LCD display panel and a data entry keypad for supporting diverse types of transactions using the PLIIM-based hand-supportable imager.

Another object of the present invention is to provide an automatically-activated PLIIM-based hand-supportable area imager configured with (i) an area-type image formation and detection (IFD) module having a variable focal length/variable focal distance image formation optics with a FOV, (ii) an automatic bar code symbol detection subsystem within its hand-supportable housing for automatically activating the planar laser illumination array (to produce a PLIB in coplanar arrangement with said FOV), the area-type image formation and detection

(IFD) module, the image frame grabber, the image data buffer, and the image processing computer for decode-processing of image data in response to the automatic detection of an bar code symbol within its bar code symbol detection field enabled by the image sensor within the IFD module, (iii) a manually-activatable switch for enabling transmission of symbol character data to a host computer system in response to decoding a bar code symbol within a captured image frame, and (iv) a LCD display panel and a data entry keypad for supporting diverse types of transactions using the PLIIM-based hand-supportable imager.

Another object of the present invention is to provide a LED-based PLIM for use in PLIIM-based systems having short working distances (e.g. less than 18 inches or so), wherein a linear-type LED, an optional focusing lens and a cylindrical lens element are mounted within compact barrel structure, for the purpose of producing a spatially-incoherent planar light illumination beam (PLIB) therefrom.

Another object of the present invention is to provide an optical process carried within a LED-based PLIM, wherein (1) the focusing lens focuses a reduced size image of the light emitting source of the LED towards the farthest working distance in the PLIIM-based system, and (2) the light rays associated with the reduced-sized image are transmitted through the cylindrical lens element to produce a spatially-coherent planar light illumination beam (PLIB).

Another object of the present invention is to provide an LED-based PLIM for use in PLIIM-based systems having short working distances, wherein a linear-type LED, a focusing lens, collimating lens and a cylindrical lens element are mounted within compact barrel structure, for the purpose of producing a spatially-incoherent planar light illumination beam (PLIB) therefrom.

Another object of the present invention is to provide an optical process carried within an LED-based PLIM, wherein (1) the focusing lens focuses a reduced size image of the light emitting source of the LED towards a focal point within the barrel structure, (2) the collimating lens collimates the light rays associated with the reduced size image of the light emitting source, and (3) the cylindrical lens element diverges the collimated light beam so as to produce a spatially-coherent planar light illumination beam (PLIOB).

Another object of the present invention is to provide an LED-based PLIM chip for use in PLIIM-based systems having short working distances, wherein a linear-type light emitting diode (LED) array, a focusing-type microlens array, collimating type microlens array, and a cylindrical-type microlens array are mounted within the IC package of the PLIM chip, for the purpose of producing a spatially-incoherent planar light illumination beam (PLIB) therefrom.

Another object of the present invention is to provide an LED-based PLIM, wherein (1) each focusing lenslet focuses a reduced size image of a light emitting source of an LED towards a focal point above the focusing-type microlens array, (2) each collimating lenslet collimates the

light rays associated with the reduced size image of the light emitting source, and (3) each cylindrical lenslet diverges the collimated light beam so as to produce a spatially-coherent planar light illumination beam (PLIB) component, which collectively produce a composite PLIB from the LED-based PLIM.

Another object of the present invention is to provide a novel method of and apparatus for measuring, in the field, the pitch and yaw angles of each slave Package Identification (PID) unit in the tunnel system, as well as the elevation (i.e. height) of each such PID unit, relative to the local coordinate reference frame symbolically embedded within the local PID unit.

Another object of the present invention is to provide such apparatus realized as angle-measurement (e.g. protractor) devices integrated within the structure of each slave and master PID housing and the support structure provided to support the same within the tunnel system, enabling the taking of such field measurements (i.e. angle and height readings) so that the precise coordinate location of each local coordinate reference frame (symbolically embedded within each PID unit) can be precisely determined, relative to the master PID unit.

Another object of the present invention is to provide such apparatus, wherein each angle measurement device is integrated into the structure of the PID unit by providing a pointer or indicating structure (e.g. arrow) on the surface of the housing of the PID unit, while mounting angle-measurement indicator on the corresponding support structure used to support the housing above the conveyor belt of the tunnel system.

Another object of the present invention is to provide a novel planar laser illumination and imaging module which employs a planar laser illumination array (PLIA) comprising a plurality of visible laser diodes having a plurality of different characteristic wavelengths residing within different portions of the visible band.

Another object of the present invention is to provide such a novel PLIIM, wherein the visible laser diodes within the PLIA thereof are spatially arranged so that the spectral components of each neighboring visible laser diode (VLD) spatially overlap and each portion of the composite PLIB along its planar extent contains a spectrum of different characteristic wavelengths, thereby imparting multi-color illumination characteristics to the composite PLIB.

Another object of the present invention is to provide such a novel PLIIM, wherein the multi-color illumination characteristics of the composite PLIB reduce the temporal coherence of the laser illumination sources in the PLIA, thereby reducing the RMS power of the speckle-noise pattern observed at the image detection array of the PLIIM.

Another object of the present invention is to provide a novel planar laser illumination and imaging module (PLIIM) which employs a planar laser illumination array (PLIA) comprising a plurality of visible laser diodes (VLDs) which exhibit high "mode-hopping" spectral characteristics which cooperate on the time domain to reduce the temporal coherence of

the laser illumination sources operating in the PLIA and produce numerous substantially different time-varying speckle-noise patterns during each photo-integration time period, thereby reducing the RMS power of the speckle-noise pattern observed at the image detection array in the PLIIM.

Another object of the present invention is to provide a novel planar laser illumination and imaging module (PLIIM) which employs a planar laser illumination array (PLIA) comprising a plurality of visible laser diodes (VLDs) which are "thermally-driven" to exhibit high "mode-hopping" spectral characteristics which cooperate on the time domain to reduce the temporal coherence of the laser illumination sources operating in the PLIA, and thereby reduce the speckle noise pattern observed at the image detection array in the PLIIM accordance with the principles of the present invention.

Another object of the present invention is to provide a unitary (PLIIM-based) package dimensioning and identification system, wherein the various information signals are generated by the LDIP subsystem, and provided to a camera control computer, and wherein the camera control computer generates digital camera control signals which are provided to the image formation and detection (IFD subsystem (i.e. "camera") so that the system can carry out its diverse functions in an integrated manner, including (1) capturing digital images having (i) square pixels (i.e. 1:1 aspect ratio) independent of package height or velocity, (ii) significantly reduced speckle-noise levels, and (iii) constant image resolution measured in dots per inch (dpi) independent of package height or velocity and without the use of costly telecentric optics employed by prior art systems, (2) automatic cropping of captured images so that only regions of interest reflecting the package or package label require image processing by the image processing computer, and (3) automatic image lifting operations.

Another object of the present invention is to provide a novel bioptical-type planar laser illumination and imaging (PLIIM) system for the purpose of identifying products in supermarkets and other retail shopping environments (e.g. by reading bar code symbols thereon), as well as recognizing the shape, texture and color of produce (e.g. fruit, vegetables, etc.) using a composite multi-spectral planar laser illumination beam containing a spectrum of different characteristic wavelengths, to impart multi-color illumination characteristics thereto.

Another object of the present invention is to provide such a bioptical-type PLIIM-based system, wherein a planar laser illumination array (PLIA) comprising a plurality of visible laser diodes (VLDs) which intrinsically exhibit high "mode-hopping" spectral characteristics which cooperate on the time domain to reduce the temporal coherence of the laser illumination sources operating in the PLIA, and thereby reduce the speckle-noise pattern observed at the image detection array of the PLIIM-based system.

Another object of the present invention is to provide a bioptical PLIIM-based product dimensioning, analysis and identification system comprising a pair of PLIIM-based package identification and dimensioning subsystems, wherein each PLIIM-based subsystem produces multi-spectral planar laser illumination, employs a 1-D CCD image detection array, and is programmed to analyze images of objects (e.g. produce) captured thereby and determine the shape/geometry, dimensions and color of such products in diverse retail shopping environments; and

Another object of the present invention is to provide a bioptical PLIM-based product dimensioning, analysis and identification system comprising a pair of PLIM-based package identification and dimensioning subsystems, wherein each subsystem employs a 2-D CCD image detection array and is programmed to analyze images of objects (e.g. produce) captured thereby and determine the shape/geometry, dimensions and color of such products in diverse retail shopping environments.

Another object of the present invention is to provide a unitary package identification and dimensioning system comprising: a LADAR-based package imaging, detecting and dimensioning subsystem capable of collecting range data from objects on the conveyor belt using a pair of multi-wavelength (i.e. containing visible and IR spectral components) laser scanning beams projected at different angular spacings; a PLIIM-based bar code symbol reading subsystem for producing a scanning volume above the conveyor belt, for scanning bar codes on packages transported therealong; an input/output subsystem for managing the inputs to and outputs from the unitary system; a data management computer, with a graphical user interface (GUI), for realizing a data element queuing, handling and processing subsystem, as well as other data and system management functions; and a network controller, operably connected to the I/O subsystem, for connecting the system to the local area network (LAN) associated with the tunnel-based system, as well as other packet-based data communication networks supporting various network protocols (e.g. Ethernet, Appletalk, etc).

Another object of the present invention is to provide a real-time camera control process carried out within a camera control computer in a PLIIM-based camera system, for intelligently enabling the camera system to zoom in and focus upon only the surfaces of a detected package which might bear package identifying and/or characterizing information that can be reliably captured and utilized by the system or network within which the camera subsystem is installed.

Another object of the present invention is to provide a real-time camera control process for significantly reducing the amount of image data captured by the system which does not contain relevant information, thus increasing the package identification performance of the camera subsystem, while using less computational resources, thereby allowing the camera subsystem to perform more efficiently and productivity.

Another object of the present invention is to provide a camera control computer for generating real-time camera control signals that drive the zoom and focus lens group translators within a high-speed auto-focus/auto-zoom digital camera subsystem so that the camera automatically captures digital images having (1) square pixels (i.e. 1:1 aspect ratio) independent of package height or velocity, (2) significantly reduced speckle-noise levels, and (3) constant image resolution measured in dots per inch (dpi) independent of package height or velocity.

Another object of the present invention is to provide an auto-focus/auto-zoom digital camera system employing a camera control computer which generates commands for cropping the corresponding slice (i.e. section) of the region of interest in the image being captured and buffered therewithin, or processed at an image processing computer.

Another object of the present invention is to provide a tunnel-type package identification and dimensioning (PIAD) system comprising a plurality of PLIIM-based package identification (PID) units arranged about a high-speed package conveyor belt structure, wherein the PID units are integrated within a high-speed data communications network having a suitable network topology and configuration.

Another object of the present invention is to provide such a tunnel-type PIAD system, wherein the top PID unit includes a LDIP subsystem, and functions as a master PID unit within the tunnel system, whereas the side and bottom PID units (which are not provided with a LDIP subsystem) function as slave PID units and are programmed to receive package dimension data (e.g. height, length and width coordinates) from the master PID unit, and automatically convert (i.e. transform) on a real-time basis these package dimension coordinates into their local coordinate reference frames for use in dynamically controlling the zoom and focus parameters of the camera subsystems employed in the tunnel-type system.

Another object of the present invention is to provide such a tunnel-type system, wherein the camera field of view (FOV) of the bottom PID unit is arranged to view packages through a small gap provided between sections of the conveyor belt structure.

Another object of the present invention is to provide a CCD camera-based tunnel system comprising auto-zoom/auto-focus CCD camera subsystems which utilize a "package-dimension data" driven camera control computer for automatic controlling the camera zoom and focus characteristics on a real-time manner.

Another object of the present invention is to provide such a CCD camera-based tunnel-type system, wherein the package-dimension data driven camera control computer involves (i) dimensioning packages in a global coordinate reference system, (ii) producing package coordinate data referenced to the global coordinate reference system, and (iii) distributing the package coordinate data to local coordinate references frames in the system for conversion of the package coordinate data to local coordinate reference frames, and subsequent use in

automatic camera zoom and focus control operations carried out upon the dimensioned packages.

Another object of the present invention is to provide such a CCD camera-based tunnel-type system, wherein a LDIP subsystem within a master camera unit generates (i) package height, width, and length coordinate data and (ii) velocity data, referenced with respect to the global coordinate reference system R_{global}, and these package dimension data elements are transmitted to each slave camera unit on a data communication network, and once received, the camera control computer within the slave camera unit uses its preprogrammed homogeneous transformation to converts there values into package height, width, and length coordinates referenced to its local coordinate reference system.

Another object of the present invention is to provide such a CCD camera-based tunnel-type system, wherein a camera control computer in each slave camera unit uses the converted package dimension coordinates to generate real-time camera control signals which intelligently drive its camera's automatic zoom and focus imaging optics to enable the intelligent capture and processing of image data containing information relating to the identify and/or destination of the transported package.

Another object of the present invention is to provide a bioptical PLIIM-based product identification, dimensioning and analysis (PIDA) system comprising a pair of PLIIM-based package identification systems arranged within a compact POS housing having bottom and side light transmission apertures, located beneath a pair of imaging windows.

Another object of the present invention is to provide such a bioptical PLIIM-based system for capturing and analyzing color images of products and produce items, and thus enabling, in supermarket environments, "produce recognition" on the basis of color as well as dimensions and geometrical form.

Another object of the present invention is to provide such a bioptical system which comprises: a bottom PLIIM-based unit mounted within the bottom portion of the housing; a side PLIIM-based unit mounted within the side portion of the housing; an electronic product weigh scale mounted beneath the bottom PLIIM-based unit; and a local data communication network mounted within the housing, and establishing a high-speed data communication link between the bottom and side units and the electronic weigh scale.

Another object of the present invention is to provide such a bioptical PLIIM-based system, wherein each PLIIM-based subsystem employs (i) a plurality of visible laser diodes (VLDs) having different color producing wavelengths to produce a multi-spectral planar laser illumination beam (PLIB) from the side and bottom imaging windows, and also (ii) a 1-D (linear-type) CCD image detection array for capturing color images of objects (e.g. produce) as

the objects are manually transported past the imaging windows of the bioptical system, along the direction of the indicator arrow, by the user or operator of the system (e.g. retail sales clerk).

Another object of the present invention is to provide such a bioptical PLIIM-based system, wherein the PLIIM-based subsystem installed within the bottom portion of the housing, projects an automatically swept PLIB and a stationary 3-D FOV through the bottom light transmission window.

Another object of the present invention is to provide such a bioptical PLIIM-based system, wherein each PLIIM-based subsystem comprises (i) a plurality of visible laser diodes (VLDs) having different color producing wavelengths to produce a multi-spectral planar laser illumination beam (PLIB) from the side and bottom imaging windows, and also (ii) a 2-D (area-type) CCD image detection array for capturing color images of objects (e.g. produce) as the objects are presented to the imaging windows of the bioptical system by the user or operator of the system (e.g. retail sales clerk).

Another object of the present invention is to provide a miniature planar laser illumination module (PLIM) on a semiconductor chip that can be fabricated by aligning and mounting a micro-sized cylindrical lens array upon a linear array of surface emit lasers (SELs) formed on a semiconductor substrate, encapsulated (i.e. encased) in a semiconductor package provided with electrical pins and a light transmission window, and emitting laser emission in the direction normal to the semiconductor substrate.

Another object of the present invention is to provide such a miniature planar laser illumination module (PLIM) on a semiconductor, wherein the laser output therefrom is a planar laser illumination beam (PLIB) composed of numerous (e.g. 100-400 or more) spatially incoherent laser beams emitted from the linear array of SELs.

Another object of the present invention is to provide such a miniature planar laser illumination module (PLIM) on a semiconductor, wherein each SEL in the laser diode array can be designed to emit coherent radiation at a different characteristic wavelengths to produce an array of laser beams which are substantially temporally and spatially incoherent with respect to each other.

Another object of the present invention is to provide such a PLIM-based semiconductor chip, which produces a temporally and spatially coherent-reduced planar laser illumination beam (PLIB) capable of illuminating objects and producing digital images having substantially reduced speckle-noise patterns observable at the image detector of the PLIIM-based system in which the PLIM is employed.

Another object of the present invention is to provide a PLIM-based semiconductor which can be made to illuminate objects outside of the visible portion of the electromagnetic spectrum (e.g. over the UV and/or IR portion of the spectrum).

Another object of the present invention is to provide a PLIM-based semiconductor chip which embodies laser mode-locking principles so that the PLIB transmitted from the chip is temporal intensity-modulated at a sufficiently high rate so as to produce ultra-short planes of light ensuring substantial levels of speckle-noise pattern reduction during object illumination and imaging applications.

Another object of the present invention is to provide a PLIM-based semiconductor chip which contains a large number of VCSELs (i.e. real laser sources) fabricated on semiconductor chip so that speckle-noise pattern levels can be substantially reduced by an amount proportional to the square root of the number of independent laser sources (real or virtual) employed therein.

Another object of the present invention is to provide such a miniature planar laser illumination module (PLIM) on a semiconductor chip which does not require any mechanical parts or components to produce a spatially and/or temporally coherence reduced PLIB during system operation.

Another object of the present invention is to provide a novel planar laser illumination and imaging module (PLIIM) realized on a semiconductor chip comprising a pair of micro-sized (diffractive or refractive) cylindrical lens arrays mounted upon a pair of linear arrays of surface emitting lasers (SELs) fabricated on opposite sides of a linear image detection array.

Another object of the present invention is to provide a PLIIM-based semiconductor chip, wherein both the linear image detection array and linear SEL arrays are formed a common semiconductor substrate, and encased within an integrated circuit package having electrical connector pins, a first and second elongated light transmission windows disposed over the SEL arrays, and a third light transmission window disposed over the linear image detection array.

Another object of the present invention is to provide such a PLIIM-based semiconductor chip, which can be mounted on a mechanically oscillating scanning element in order to sweep both the FOV and coplanar PLIB through a 3-D volume of space in which objects bearing bar code and other machine-readable indicia may pass.

Another object of the present invention is to provide a novel PLIIM-based semiconductor chip embodying a plurality of linear SEL arrays which are electronically-activated to electro-optically scan (i.e. illuminate) the entire 3-D FOV of the image detection array without using mechanical scanning mechanisms.

Another object of the present invention is to provide such a PLIIM-based semiconductor chip, wherein the miniature 2D VLD/CCD camera can be realized by fabricating a 2-D array of SEL diodes about a centrally located 2-D area-type image detection array, both on a semiconductor substrate and encapsulated within a IC package having a centrally-located light

transmission window positioned over the image detection array, and a peripheral light transmission window positioned over the surrounding 2-D array of SEL diodes.

Another object of the present invention is to provide such a PLIIM-based semiconductor chip, wherein light focusing lens element is aligned with and mounted over the centrally-located light transmission window to define a 3D field of view (FOV) for forming images on the 2-D image detection array, whereas a 2-D array of cylindrical lens elements is aligned with and mounted over the peripheral light transmission window to substantially planarize the laser emission from the linear SEL arrays (comprising the 2-D SEL array) during operation.

Another object of the present invention is to provide such a PLIIM-based semiconductor chip, wherein each cylindrical lens element is spatially aligned with a row (or column) in the 2-D CCD image detection array, and each linear array of SELs in the 2-D SEL array, over which a cylindrical lens element is mounted, is electrically addressable (i.e. activatable) by laser diode control and drive circuits which can be fabricated on the same semiconductor substrate.

Another object of the present invention is to provide such a PLIIM-based semiconductor chip which enables the illumination of an object residing within the 3D FOV during illumination operations, and the formation of an image strip on the corresponding rows (or columns) of detector elements in the image detection array.

As will be described in greater detail in the Detailed Description of the Illustrative Embodiments set forth below, such objectives are achieved in novel methods of and systems for illuminating objects (e.g. bar coded packages, textual materials, graphical indicia, etc.) using planar laser illumination beams (PLIBs) having substantially-planar spatial distribution characteristics that extend through the field of view (FOV) of image formation and detection modules (e.g. realized within a CCD-type digital electronic camera, or a 35 mm optical-film photographic camera) employed in such systems.

In the illustrative embodiments of the present invention, the substantially planar light illumination beams are preferably produced from a planar laser illumination beam array (PLIA) comprising a plurality of planar laser illumination modules (PLIMs). Each PLIM comprises a visible laser diode (VLD), a focusing lens, and a cylindrical optical element arranged therewith. The individual planar laser illumination beam components produced from each PLIM are optically combined within the PLIA to produce a composite substantially planar laser illumination beam having substantially uniform power density characteristics over the entire spatial extent thereof and thus the working range of the system, in which the PLIA is embodied.

Preferably, each planar laser illumination beam component is focused so that the minimum beam width thereof occurs at a point or plane which is the farthest or maximum object distance at which the system is designed to acquire images. In the case of both fixed and variable focal length imaging systems, this inventive principle helps compensate for decreases

in the power density of the incident planar laser illumination beam due to the fact that the width of the planar laser illumination beam increases in length for increasing object distances away from the imaging subsystem.

By virtue of the novel principles of the present invention, it is now possible to use both VLDs and high-speed electronic (e.g. CCD or CMOS) image detectors in conveyor, hand-held, presentation, and hold-under type imaging applications alike, enjoying the advantages and benefits that each such technology has to offer, while avoiding the shortcomings and drawbacks hitherto associated therewith.

These and other objects of the present invention will become apparent hereinafter and in the Claims to Invention.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

For a more complete understanding of the present invention, the following Detailed Description of the Illustrative Embodiment should be read in conjunction with the accompanying Drawings, wherein:

Fig. 1A is a schematic representation of a first generalized embodiment of the planar laser illumination and (electronic) imaging (PLIIM) system of the present invention, wherein a pair of planar laser illumination arrays (PLIAs) are mounted on opposite sides of a linear (i.e. 1-dimensional) type image formation and detection (IFD) module (i.e. camera subsystem) having a fixed focal length imaging lens, a fixed focal distance and fixed field of view, such that the planar illumination array produces a stationary (i.e. non-scanned) plane of laser beam illumination which is disposed substantially coplanar with the field of view of the image formation and detection module during object illumination and image detection operations carried out by the PLIIM-based system on a moving bar code symbol or other graphical structure;

Fig. 1B1 is a schematic representation of the first illustrative embodiment of the PLIIM-based system of the present invention shown in Fig. 1A, wherein the field of view of the image formation and detection (IFD) module is folded in the downwardly imaging direction by the field of view folding mirror so that both the folded field of view and resulting stationary planar laser illumination beams produced by the planar illumination arrays are arranged in a substantially coplanar relationship during object illumination and image detection operations;

Fig. 1B2 is a schematic representation of the PLIIM-based system shown in Fig. 1A, wherein the linear image formation and detection module is shown comprising a linear array of photo-electronic detectors realized using CCD technology, each planar laser illumination array is shown comprising an array of planar laser illumination modules;

Fig. 1B3 is an enlarged view of a portion of the planar laser illumination beam (PLIB) and magnified field of view (FOV) projected onto an object during conveyor-type illumination and imaging applications shown in Fig. 1B1, illustrating that the height dimension of the PLIB is substantially greater than the height dimension of each image detection element in the linear CCD image detection array so as to decrease the range of tolerance that must be maintained between the PLIB and the FOV;

Fig. 1B4 is a schematic representation of an illustrative embodiment of a planar laser illumination array (PLIA), wherein each PLIM mounted therealong can be adjustably tilted about the optical axis of the VLD, a few degrees measured from the horizontal plane;

Fig. 1B5 is a schematic representation of a PLIM mounted along the PLIA shown in Fig. 1B4, illustrating that each VLD block can be adjustably pitched forward for alignment with other VLD beams produced from the PLIA;

Fig. 1C is a schematic representation of a first illustrative embodiment of a single-VLD planar laser illumination module (PLIM) used to construct each planar laser illumination array shown in Fig. 1B, wherein the planar laser illumination beam emanates substantially within a single plane along the direction of beam propagation towards an object to be optically illuminated;

Fig. 1D is a schematic diagram of the planar laser illumination module of Fig. 1C, shown comprising a visible laser diode (VLD), a light collimating focusing lens, and a cylindrical-type lens element configured together to produce a beam of planar laser illumination;

Fig. 1E1 is a plan view of the VLD, collimating lens and cylindrical lens assembly employed in the planar laser illumination module of Fig. 1C, showing that the focused laser beam from the collimating lens is directed on the input side of the cylindrical lens, and the output beam produced therefrom is a planar laser illumination beam expanded (i.e. spread out) along the plane of propagation;

Fig. 1E2 is an elevated side view of the VLD, collimating focusing lens and cylindrical lens assembly employed in the planar laser illumination module of Fig. 1C, showing that the laser beam is transmitted through the cylindrical lens without expansion in the direction normal to the plane of propagation, but is focused by the collimating focusing lens at a point residing within a plane located at the farthest object distance supported by the PLIIM system;

Fig. 1F is a block schematic diagram of the PLIIM-based system shown in Fig. 1A, comprising a pair of planar laser illumination arrays (driven by a set of digitally-programmable VLD driver circuits that can drive the VLDs in a high-frequency pulsed-mode of operation), a linear-type image formation and detection (IFD) module or camera subsystem, a stationary field of view (FOV) folding mirror, an image frame grabber, an image data buffer, an image processing computer, and a camera control computer;

Fig. 1G1 is a schematic representation of an exemplary realization of the PLIIM-based system of Fig. 1A, shown comprising a linear image formation and detection (IFD) module, a pair of planar laser illumination arrays, and a field of view (FOV) folding mirror for folding the fixed field of view of the linear image formation and detection module in a direction that is coplanar with the plane of laser illumination beams produced by the planar laser illumination arrays;

Fig. 1G2 is a plan view schematic representation of the PLIIM-based system of Fig. 1G1, taken along line 1G2-1G2 therein, showing the spatial extent of the fixed field of view of the linear image formation and detection module in the illustrative embodiment of the present invention;

Figs. 1G3 is an elevated end view schematic representation of the PLIIM-based system of Fig. 1G1, taken along line 1G3-1G3 therein, showing the fixed field of view of the linear image formation and detection module being folded in the downwardly imaging direction by the field of view folding mirror, the planar laser illumination beam produced by each planar laser illumination module being directed in the imaging direction such that both the folded field of view and planar laser illumination beams are arranged in a substantially coplanar relationship during object illumination and image detection operations;

Fig. 1G4 is an elevated side view schematic representation of the PLIIM-based system of Fig. 1G1, taken along line 1G4-1G4 therein, showing the field of view of the image formation and detection module being folded in the downwardly imaging direction by the field of view folding mirror, and the planar laser illumination beam produced by each planar laser illumination module being directed along the imaging direction such that both the folded field of view and stationary planar laser illumination beams are arranged in a substantially coplanar relationship during object illumination and image detection operations;

Fig. 1G5 is an elevated side view of the PLIIM-based system of Fig. 1G1, showing the spatial limits of the fixed field of view (FOV) of the image formation and detection module when set to image the tallest packages moving on a conveyor belt structure, as well as the spatial limits of the fixed FOV of the image formation and detection module when set to image objects having height values close to the surface height of the conveyor belt structure;

Fig. 1G6 is a perspective view of a first type of light shield which can be used in the PLIIM-based system of Fig. 1G1, to visually block portions of planar laser illumination beams which extend beyond the scanning field of the system, and could pose a health risk to humans if viewed thereby during system operation;

Fig. 1G7 is a perspective view of a second type of light shield which can be used in the PLIIM-based system of Fig. 1G1, to visually block portions of planar laser illumination beams

which extend beyond the scanning field of the system, and could pose a health risk to humans if viewed thereby during system operation;

Fig. 1G8 is a perspective view of one planar laser illumination array (PLIA) employed in the PLIIM-based system of Fig. 1G1, showing an array of visible laser diodes (VLDs), each mounted within a VLD mounting block, wherein a focusing lens is mounted and on the end of which there is a v-shaped notch or recess, within which a cylindrical lens element is mounted, and wherein each such VLD mounting block is mounted on an L-bracket for mounting within the housing of the PLIIM-based system;

Fig. 1G9 is an elevated end view of one planar laser illumination array (PLIA) employed in the PLIIM-based system of Fig. 1G1, taken along line 1G9-1G9 thereof;

Fig. 1G10 is an elevated side view of one planar laser illumination array (PLIA) employed in the PLIIM-based system of Fig. 1G1, taken along line 1G10-1G10 therein, showing a visible laser diode (VLD) and a focusing lens mounted within a VLD mounting block, and a cylindrical lens element mounted at the end of the VLD mounting block, so that the central axis of the cylindrical lens element is substantially perpendicular to the optical axis of the focusing lens;

Fig. 1G11 is an elevated side view of one of the VLD mounting blocks employed in the PLIIM-based system of Fig. 1G1, taken along a viewing direction which is orthogonal to the central axis of the cylindrical lens element mounted to the end portion of the VLD mounting block;

Fig. 1G12 is an elevated plan view of one of VLD mounting blocks employed in the PLIIM-based system of Fig. 1G1, taken along a viewing direction which is parallel to the central axis of the cylindrical lens element mounted to the VLD mounting block;

Fig. 1G13 is an elevated side view of the collimating lens element installed within each VLD mounting block employed in the PLIIM-based system of Fig. 1G1;

Fig. 1G14 is an axial view of the collimating lens element installed within each VLD mounting block employed in the PLIIM-based system of Fig. 1G1;

Fig. 1G15A is an elevated plan view of one of planar laser illumination modules (PLIMs) employed in the PLIIM-based system of Fig. 1G1, taken along a viewing direction which is parallel to the central axis of the cylindrical lens element mounted in the VLD mounting block thereof, showing that the cylindrical lens element expands (i.e. spreads out) the laser beam along the direction of beam propagation so that a substantially planar laser illumination beam is produced, which is characterized by a plane of propagation that is coplanar with the direction of beam propagation;

Fig. 1G15B is an elevated plan view of one of the PLIMs employed in the PLIIM-based system of Fig. 1G1, taken along a viewing direction which is perpendicular to the central axis of

the cylindrical lens element mounted within the axial bore of the VLD mounting block thereof, showing that the focusing lens planar focuses the laser beam to its minimum beam width at a point which is the farthest distance at which the system is designed to capture images, while the cylindrical lens element does not expand or spread out the laser beam in the direction normal to the plane of propagation of the planar laser illumination beam;

Fig. 1G16A is a perspective view of a second illustrative embodiment of the PLIM of the present invention, wherein a first illustrative embodiment of a Powell-type linear diverging lens is used to produce the planar laser illumination beam (PLIB) therefrom;

Fig. 1G16B is a perspective view of a third illustrative embodiment of the PLIM of the present invention, wherein a generalized embodiment of a Powell-type linear diverging lens is used to produce the planar laser illumination beam (PLIB) therefrom;

Fig. 1G17A is a perspective view of a fourth illustrative embodiment of the PLIM of the present invention, wherein a visible laser diode (VLD) and a pair of small cylindrical lenses are all mounted within a lens barrel permitting independent adjustment of these optical components along translational and rotational directions, thereby enabling the generation of a substantially planar laser beam (PLIB) therefrom, wherein the first cylindrical lens is a PCX–type lens having a plano (i.e. flat) surface and one outwardly cylindrical surface with a positive focal length and its base and the edges cut according to a circular profile for focusing the laser beam, and the second cylindrical lens is a PCV-type lens having a plano (i.e. flat) surface and one inward cylindrical surface having a negative focal length and its base and edges cut according to a circular profile, for use in spreading (i.e. diverging or planarizing) the laser beam;

Fig. 1G17B is a cross-sectional view of the PLIM shown in Fig. 1G17A illustrating that the PCX lens is capable of undergoing translation in the x direction for focusing;

Fig. 1G17C is a cross-sectional view of the PLIM shown in Fig. 1G17A illustrating that the PCX lens is capable of undergoing rotation about the x axis to ensure that it only effects the beam along one axis;

Fig. 1G17D is a cross-sectional view of the PLIM shown in Fig. 1G17A illustrating that the PCV lens is capable of undergoing rotation about the x axis to ensure that it only effects the beam along one axis;

Fig. 1G17E is a cross-sectional view of the PLIM shown in Fig. 1G17A illustrating that the VLD requires rotation about the y axis for aiming purposes;

Fig. 1G17F is a cross-sectional view of the PLIM shown in Fig. 1G17A illustrating that the VLD requires rotation about the x axis for desmiling purposes;

Fig. 1H1 is a geometrical optics model for the imaging subsystem employed in the linear-type image formation and detection module in the PLIIM system of the first generalized embodiment shown in Fig. 1A;

Fig. 1H2 is a geometrical optics model for the imaging subsystem and linear image detection array employed in the linear-type image detection array of the image formation and detection module in the PLIIM system of the first generalized embodiment shown in Fig. 1A;

Fig. 1H3 is a graph, based on thin lens analysis, showing that the image distance at which light is focused through a thin lens is a function of the object distance at which the light originates;

Fig. 1H4 is a schematic representation of an imaging subsystem having a variable focal distance lens assembly, wherein a group of lens can be controllably moved along the optical axis of the subsystem, and having the effect of changing the image distance to compensate for a change in object distance, allowing the image detector to remain in place;

Fig. 1H5 is schematic representation of a variable focal length (zoom) imaging subsystem which is capable of changing its focal length over a given range, so that a longer focal length produces a smaller field of view at a given object distance;

Fig. 1H6 is a schematic representation illustrating (i) the projection of a CCD image detection element (i.e. pixel) onto the object plane of the image formation and detection (IFD) module (i.e. camera subsystem) employed in the PLIIM systems of the present invention, and (ii) various optical parameters used to model the camera subsystem;

Fig. 1I1 is a schematic representation of the PLIIM system of Fig. 1A embodying a first generalized method of reducing the RMS power of observable speckle-noise patterns, wherein the planar laser illumination beam (PLIB) produced from the PLIIM system is spatial phase modulated along its wavefront according to a spatial phase modulation function (SIMF) prior to object illumination, so that the object (e.g. package) is illuminated with a spatially coherent-reduced planar laser beam and, as a result, numerous substantially different time-varying speckle-noise patterns are produced and detected over the photo-integration time period of the image detection array, thereby allowing the speckle-noise patterns to be temporally and spatially averaged over the photo-integration time over the image detection elements and the RMS power of the observable speckle-noise pattern reduced at the image detection array;

Fig. 1I2A is a schematic representation of the PLIM system of Fig. 1I1, illustrating the first generalized speckle-noise pattern reduction method of the present invention applied to the planar laser illumination array (PLIA) employed therein, wherein numerous substantially different speckle-noise patterns are produced at the image detection array during the photo-integration time period thereof using spatial phase modulation techniques to modulate the phase along the wavefront of the PLIB, and temporally and spatially averaged at the image

detection array during the photo-integration time period thereof, thereby reducing the RMS power of speckle-noise patterns observed at the image detection array;

Fig. 1I2B is a high-level flow chart setting forth the primary steps involved in practicing the first generalized method of reducing the RMS power of observable speckle-noise patterns in PLIIM-based Systems, illustrated in Figs. 1I1 and 1I2A;

Fig. 1I3A is a perspective view of an optical assembly comprising a planar laser illumination array (PLIA) with a pair of refractive-type cylindrical lens arrays, and an electronically-controlled mechanism for micro-oscillating the cylindrical lens arrays using two pairs of ultrasonic transducers arranged in a push-pull configuration so that transmitted planar laser illumination beam (PLIB) is spatial phase modulated along its wavefront producing numerous (i.e. many) substantially different time-varying speckle-noise patterns at the image detection array of the IFD Subsystem during the photo-integration time period thereof, and enabling numerous time-varying speckle-noise patterns produced at the image detection array to be temporally and/or spatially averaged during the photo-integration time period thereof, thereby reducing the speckle-noise patterns observed at the image detection array;

Fig. 1I3B is a perspective view of the pair of refractive-type cylindrical lens arrays employed in the optical assembly shown in Fig. 1I3A;

Fig. 1I3C is a perspective view of the dual array support frame employed in the optical assembly shown in Fig. 1I3A;

Fig. 1I3D is a schematic representation of the dual refractive-type cylindrical lens array structure employed in Fig. 1I3A, shown configured between two pairs of ultrasonic transducers (or flexural elements driven by voice-coil type devices) operated in a push-pull mode of operation, so that at least one cylindrical lens array is constantly moving when the other array is momentarily stationary during lens array direction reversal;

Fig. 1I3E is a geometrical model of a subsection of the optical assembly shown in Fig. 1I3A, illustrating the first order parameters involved in the PLIB spatial phase modulation process, which are required for there to be a difference in phase along wavefront of the PLIB so that each speckle-noise pattern viewed by a pair of cylindrical lens elements in the imaging optics becomes uncorrelated with respect to the original speckle-noise pattern;

Fig. 1I3F is a pictorial representation of a string of numbers imaged by the PLIIM-based system of the present invention without the use of the first generalized speckle-noise reduction techniques of the present invention;

Fig. 1I3G is a pictorial representation of the same string of numbers (shown in Fig. 1G13B1) imaged by the PLIIM-based system of the present invention using the first generalized speckle-noise reduction technique of the present invention, and showing a significant reduction in speckle-noise patterns observed in digital images captured by the electronic image detection

array employed in the PLIIM-based system of the present invention provided with the apparatus of Fig. 1I3A;

Fig. 1I4A is a perspective view of an optical assembly comprising a pair of (holographically-fabricated) diffractive-type cylindrical lens arrays, and an electronically-controlled mechanism for micro-oscillating a pair of cylindrical lens arrays using a pair of ultrasonic transducers arranged in a push-pull configuration so that the composite planar laser illumination beam is spatial phase modulated along its wavefront, producing numerous substantially different time-varying speckle-noise patterns at the image detection array of the IFD Subsystem during the photo-integration time period thereof, so that the numerous time-varying speckle-noise patterns produced at the image detection array can be temporally and spatially averaged during the photo-integration time period thereof, thereby reducing the speckle-noise patterns observed at the image detection array;

Fig. 1I4B is a perspective view of the refractive-type cylindrical lens arrays employed in the optical assembly shown in Fig. 1I4A;

Fig. 1I4C is a perspective view of the dual array support frame employed in the optical assembly shown in Fig. 1I4A;

Fig. 1I4D is a schematic representation of the dual refractive-type cylindrical lens array structure employed in Fig. 1I4A, shown configured between a pair of ultrasonic transducers (or flexural elements driven by voice-coil type devices) operated in a push-pull mode of operation;

Fig. 1I5A is a perspective view of an optical assembly comprising a PLIA with a stationary refractive-type cylindrical lens array, and an electronically-controlled mechanism for micro-oscillating a pair of reflective-elements pivotally connected to each other at a common pivot point, relative to a stationary reflective element (e.g. mirror element) and the stationary refractive-type cylindrical lens array so that the transmitted PLIB is spatial phase modulated along its wavefront, producing numerous substantially different time-varying speckle-noise patterns produced at the image detection array of the IFD Subsystem during the photo-integration time period thereof, so that the numerous time-varying speckle-noise patterns produced at the image detection array can be temporally and spatially averaged during the photo-integration time period thereof, thereby reducing the speckle-noise patterns observed at the image detection array;

Fig. 1I5B is a enlarged perspective view of the pair of micro-oscillating reflective elements employed in the optical assembly shown in Fig. 1I5A;

Fig. 1I5C is a schematic representation, taken along an elevated side view of the optical assembly shown in Fig. 1I5A, showing the optical path which the laser illumination beam produced thereby travels towards the target object to be illuminated;

Fig. 1I5D is a schematic representation of one micro-oscillating reflective element in the pair employed in Fig. 1I5D, shown configured between a pair of ultrasonic transducers operated in a push-pull mode of operation, so as to undergo micro-oscillation;

Fig. 1I6A is a perspective view of an optical assembly comprising a PLIA with refractive-type cylindrical lens array, and an electro-acoustically controlled PLIB micro-oscillation mechanism realized by an acousto-optical (i.e. Bragg Cell) beam deflection device, through which the planar laser illumination beam (PLIB) from each PLIM is transmitted and spatial phase modulated along its wavefront, in response to acoustical signals propagating through the electro-acoustical device, causing each PLIB to be micro-oscillated (i.e. repeatedly deflected) and producing numerous substantially different time-varying speckle-noise patterns at the image detection array of the IFD Subsystem during the photo-integration time period thereof, which are temporally and spatially averaged during the photo-integration time period thereof, thereby reducing the RMS power of speckle-noise patterns observed at the image detection array;

Fig. 1I6B is a schematic representation, taken along the cross-section of the optical assembly shown in Fig. 1I6A, showing the optical path which each laser beam within the PLIM travels on its way towards a target object to be illuminated;

Fig. 1I7A is a perspective view of an optical assembly comprising a PLIA with a stationary cylindrical lens array, and an electronically-controlled PLIB micro-oscillation mechanism realized by a piezo-electrically driven deformable mirror (DM) structure and a stationary beam folding mirror are arranged in front of the stationary cylindrical lens array (e.g. realized refractive, diffractive and/or reflective principles), wherein the surface of the DM structure is periodically deformed at frequencies in the 100kHz range and at few microns amplitude causing the reflective surface thereof to exhibit moving ripples aligned along the direction that is perpendicular to planar extent of the PLIB (i.e. along laser beam spread) so that the transmitted PLIB is spatial phase modulated along its wavefront, producing numerous substantially different time-varying speckle-noise patterns at the image detection array of the IFD Subsystem during the photo-integration time period thereof, which are temporally and spatially averaged during the photo-integration time period thereof, thereby reducing the RMS power of speckle-noise patterns observed at the image detection array;

Fig. 1I7B is an enlarged perspective view of the stationary beam folding mirror structure employed in the optical assembly shown in Fig. 1I7A;

Fig. 1I7C is a schematic representation, taken along an elevated side view of the optical assembly shown in Fig. 1I7A, showing the optical path which the laser illumination beam produced thereby travels towards the target object to be illuminated while undergoing phase modulation by the piezo-electrically driven deformable mirror structure;

Fig. 1I8A is a perspective view of an optical assembly comprising a PLIA with a stationary refractive-type cylindrical lens array, and a PLIB micro-oscillation mechanism realized by a refractive-type phase-modulation disc that is rotated about its axis through the composite planar laser illumination beam so that the transmitted PLIB is spatial phase modulated along its wavefront as it is transmitted through the phase modulation disc, producing numerous substantially different time-varying speckle-noise patterns at the image detection array during the photo-integration time period thereof, which are temporally and spatially averaged during the photo-integration time period thereof, thereby reducing the RMS power of speckle-noise patterns observed at the image detection array;

Fig. 1I8B is an elevated side view of the refractive-type phase-modulation disc employed in the optical assembly shown in Fig. 1I8A;

Fig. 1I8C is a plan view of the optical assembly shown in Fig. 1I8A, showing the resulting micro-oscillation of the PLIB components caused by the phase modulation introduced by the refractive-type phase modulation disc rotating in the optical path of the PLIB;

Fig. 1I8D is a schematic representation of the refractive-type phase-modulation disc employed in the optical assembly shown in Fig. 1I8A, showing the numerous sections of the disc, which have refractive indices that vary sinusoidally at different angular positions along the disc;

Fig. 1I8E is a schematic representation of the rotating phase-modulation disc and stationary cylindrical lens array employed in the optical assembly shown in Fig. 1I8A, showing that the electric field components produced from neighboring elements in the cylindrical lens array are optically combined and projected into the same points of the surface being illuminated, thereby contributing to the resultant electric field intensity at each detector element in the image detection array of the IFD Subsystem;

Fig. 1I8F is a schematic representation of an optical assembly for reducing the RMS power of speckle-noise patterns in PLIIM-based systems, shown comprising a PLIA, a backlit transmissive-type phase-only LCD (PO-LCD) phase modulation panel, and a cylindrical lens array positioned closely thereto arranged as shown so that each planar laser illumination beam (PLIB) is spatial phase modulated along its wavefront as it is transmitted through the PO-LCD phase modulation panel, producing numerous substantially different time-varying speckle-noise patterns at the image detection array of the IFD Subsystem during the photo-integration time period of the image detection array thereof, which are temporally and spatially averaged during the photo-integration time period thereof, thereby reducing the RMS power of speckle-noise patterns observed at the image detection array;

Fig. 1I8G is a plan view of the optical assembly shown in Fig. 1I8F, showing the resulting micro-oscillation of the PLIB components caused by the phase modulation introduced

by the phase-only type LCD-based phase modulation panel disposed along the optical path of the PLIB;

Fig. 1I9A is a perspective view of an optical assembly comprising a PLIA and a PLIB phase modulation mechanism realized by a refractive-type cylindrical lens array ring structure that is rotated about its axis through a transmitted PLIB so that the transmitted PLIB is spatial phase modulated along its wavefront, producing numerous substantially different time-varying speckle-noise patterns at the image detection array of the IFD Subsystem during the photo-integration time period thereof, which are temporally and spatially averaged during the photo-integration time period thereof, thereby reducing the RMS power of the speckle-noise patterns observed at the image detection array;

Fig. 1I9B is a plan view of the optical assembly shown in Fig. 1I9A, showing the resulting micro-oscillation of the PLIB components caused by the phase modulation introduced by the cylindrical lens ring structure rotating about each PLIA in the PLIIM-based system;

Fig. 1I10A is a perspective view of an optical assembly comprising a PLIA, and a PLIB phase-modulation mechanism realized by a diffractive-type (e.g. holographic) cylindrical lens array ring structure that is rotated about its axis through the transmitted PLIB so the transmitted PLIB is spatial phase modulated along its wavefront, producing numerous substantially different time-varying speckle-noise patterns at the image detection array of the IFD Subsystem during the photo-integration time period thereof, which are temporally and spatially averaged during the photo-integration time period thereof, thereby reducing the speckle-noise patterns observed at the image detection array;

Fig. 1I10B is a plan view of the optical assembly shown in Fig. 1I10A, showing the resulting micro-oscillation of the PLIB components caused by the phase modulation introduced by the cylindrical lens ring structure rotating about each PLIA in the PLIIM-based system;

Fig. 1I11A is a perspective view of a PLIIM-based system as shown in Fig. 1I1 embodying a pair of optical assemblies, each comprising a PLIB phase-modulation mechanism stationarily mounted between a pair of PLIAs towards which the PLIAs direct a PLIB, wherein the PLIB phase-modulation mechanism is realized by a reflective-type phase modulation disc structure having a cylindrical surface with (periodic or random) surface irregularities, rotated about its axis through the PLIB so as to spatial phase modulate the transmitted PLIB along its wavefront, producing numerous substantially different time-varying speckle-noise patterns at the image detection array of the IFD Subsystem during the photo-integration time period thereof, so that the numerous time-varying speckle-noise patterns can be temporally and spatially averaged during the photo-integration time period thereof, thereby reducing the RMS power of speckle-noise patterns observed at the image detection array;

Fig. 1I11B is an elevated side view of the PLIIM-based system shown in Fig. 1I11A;

Fig. 1I11C is an elevated side view of one of the optical assemblies shown in Fig. 1I11A, schematically illustrating how the individual beam components in the PLIB are directed onto the rotating reflective-type phase modulation disc structure and are phase modulated as they are reflected thereoff in a direction of coplanar alignment with the field of view (FOV) of the IFD subsystem of the PLIIM-based system;

Fig. 1I12A is a perspective view of an optical assembly comprising a PLIA and stationary cylindrical lens array, wherein each planar laser illumination module (PLIM) employed therein includes an integrated phase-modulation mechanism realized by a multi-faceted (refractive-type) polygon lens structure having an array of cylindrical lens surfaces symmetrically arranged about its circumference so that while the polygon lens structure is rotated about its axis, the resulting PLIB transmitted from the PLIA is spatial phase modulated along its wavefront, producing numerous substantially different time-varying speckle-noise patterns at the image detection array of the IFD Subsystem during the photo-integration time period thereof, so that the numerous time-varying speckle-noise patterns produced at the image detection array can be temporally and spatially averaged during the photo-integration time period thereof, thereby reducing the speckle-noise patterns observed at the image detection array;

Fig. 1I12B is a perspective exploded view of the rotatable multi-faceted polygon lens structure employed in each PLIM in the PLIA of Fig. 1I12A, shown rotatably supported within an apertured housing by a upper and lower sets of ball bearings, so that while the polygon lens structure is rotated about its axis, the focused laser beam generated from the VLD in the PLIM is transmitted through a first aperture in the housing and then into the polygon lens structure via a first cylindrical lens element, and emerges from a second cylindrical lens element as a planarized laser illumination beam (PLIB) which is transmitted through a second aperture in the housing, wherein the second cylindrical lens element is diametrically opposed to the first cylindrical lens element;

Fig. 1I12C is a plan view of one of the PLIMs employed in the PLIA shown in Fig. 1I12A, wherein a gear element is fixed attached to the upper portion of the polygon lens element so as to rotate the same a high angular velocity during operation of the optically-based speckle-pattern noise reduction assembly;

Fig. 1I12D is a perspective view of the optically-based speckle-pattern noise reduction assembly of Fig. 1I12A, wherein the polygon lens element in each PLIM is rotated by an electric motor, operably connected to the plurality of polygon lens elements by way of the intermeshing gear elements connected to the same, during the generation of component PLIBs from each of the PLIMS in the PLIA;

Fig. 1I13 is a schematic of the PLIIM system of Fig. 1A embodying a second generalized method of reducing the RMS power of observable speckle-noise patterns, wherein the planar laser illumination beam (PLIB) produced from the PLIIM system is temporal intensity modulated by a temporal intensity modulation function (TIMF) prior to object illumination, so that the target object (e.g. package) is illuminated with a temporally coherent-reduced laser beam and, as a result, numerous substantially different time-varying speckle-noise patterns are produced and detected over the photo-integration time period of the image detection array, thereby allowing the speckle-noise patterns to be temporally averaged over the photo-integration time period and/or spatially averaged over the image detection element and the observable speckle-noise pattern reduced;

Fig. 1I13A is a schematic representation of the PLIIM-based system of Fig. 1I13, illustrating the second generalized speckle-noise pattern reduction method of the present invention applied to the planar laser illumination array (PLIA) employed therein, wherein numerous substantially different speckle-noise patterns are produced at the image detection array during the photo-integration time period thereof using temporal intensity modulation techniques to modulate the temporal intensity of the wavefront of the PLIB, and temporally and spatially averaged at the image detection array during the photo-integration time period thereof, thereby reducing the RMS power of speckle-noise patterns observed at the image detection array;

Fig. 1I13B is a high-level flow chart setting forth the primary steps involved in practicing the second generalized method of reducing observable speckle-noise patterns in PLIIM-based systems, illustrated in Figs. 1I13 and 1I13A;

Fig. 1I14A is a perspective view of an optical assembly comprising a PLIA with a cylindrical lens array, and an electronically-controlled PLIB modulation mechanism realized by a high-speed laser beam temporal intensity modulation structure (e.g. electro-optical gating or shutter device) arranged in front of the cylindrical lens array, wherein the transmitted PLIB is temporally intensity modulated according to a temporal intensity modulation (e.g. windowing) function (TIMF), producing numerous substantially different time-varying speckle-noise patterns at image detection array of the IFD Subsystem during the photo-integration time period thereof, which are temporally and spatially averaged during the photo-integration time period thereof, thereby reducing the RMS power of speckle-noise patterns observed at the image detection array;

Fig. 1I14B is a schematic representation, taken along the cross-section of the optical assembly shown in Fig. 1I14A, showing the optical path which each optically-gated PLIB component within the PLIB travels on its way towards the target object to be illuminated;

Fig. 1I15A is a perspective view of an optical assembly comprising a PLIA embodying a plurality of visible mode-locked laser diodes (MLLDs), arranged in front of a cylindrical lens array, wherein the transmitted PLIB is temporal intensity modulated according to a temporal-intensity modulation (e.g. windowing) function (TIMF), temporal intensity of numerous substantially different speckle-noise patterns are produced at the image detection array of the IFD subsystem during the photo-integration time period thereof, which are temporally and spatially averaged during the photo-integration time period of the image detection array, thereby reducing the RMS power of speckle-noise patterns observed at the image detection array;

Fig. 1I15B is a schematic diagram of one of the visible MLLDs employed in the PLIM of Fig. 1I15A, show comprising a multimode laser diode cavity referred to as the active layer (e.g. InGaAsP) having a wide emission-bandwidth over the visible band, a collimating lenslet having a very short focal length, an active mode-locker under switched control (e.g. a temporal-intensity modulator), a passive-mode locker (i.e. saturable absorber) for controlling the pulse-width of the output laser beam, and a mirror which is 99% reflective and 1% transmissive at the operative wavelength of the visible MLLD;

Fig. 1I15C is a perspective view of an optical assembly comprising a PLIA embodying a plurality of visible laser diodes (VLDs), which are driven by a digitally-controlled programmable drive-current source and arranged in front of a cylindrical lens array, wherein the transmitted PLIB from the PLIA is temporal intensity modulated according to a temporal-intensity modulation function (TIMF) controlled by the programmable drive-current source, modulating the temporal intensity of the wavefront of the transmitted PLIB and producing numerous substantially different speckle-noise patterns at the image detection array of the IFD subsystem during the photo-integration time period thereof, which are temporally and spatially averaged during the photo-integration time period of the image detection array, thereby reducing the RMS power of speckle-noise patterns observed at the image detection array;

Fig. 1I15D is a schematic diagram of the temporal intensity modulation (TIM) controller employed in the optical subsystem of Fig. 1I15E, shown comprising a plurality of VLDs, each arranged in series with a current source and a potentiometer digitally-controlled by a programmable micro-controller in operable communication with the camera control computer of the PLIIM-based system;

Fig. 1I15E is a schematic representation of an exemplary triangular current waveform transmitted across the junction of each VLD in the PLIA of Fig. 1I15C, controlled by the micro-controller, current source and digital potentiometer associated with the VLD;

Fig. 1I15F is a schematic representation of the light intensity output from each VLD in the PLIA of Fig. 1I15C, in response to the triangular electrical current waveform transmitted across the junction of the VLD;

Fig. 1I16 is a schematic of the PLIIM system of Fig. 1A embodying a third generalized method of reducing the RMS power of observable speckle-noise patterns, wherein the planar laser illumination beam (PLIB) produced from the PLIIM system is temporal phase modulated by a temporal phase modulation function (TPMF) prior to object illumination, so that the target object (e.g. package) is illuminated with a temporally coherent-reduced laser beam and, as a result, numerous substantially different time-varying speckle-noise patterns are produced and detected over the photo-integration time period of the image detection array, thereby allowing the speckle-noise patterns to be temporally averaged over the photo-integration time period and/or spatially averaged over the image detection element and the observable speckle-noise pattern reduced;

Fig. 1I16A is a schematic representation of the PLIIM-based system of Fig. 1I16, illustrating the third generalized speckle-noise pattern reduction method of the present invention applied to the planar laser illumination array (PLIA) employed therein, wherein numerous substantially different speckle-noise patterns are produced at the image detection array during the photo-integration time period thereof using temporal phase modulation techniques to modulate the temporal phase of the wavefront of the PLIB (i.e. by an amount exceeding the coherence time length of the VLD), and temporally and spatially averaged at the image detection array during the photo-integration time period thereof, thereby reducing the RMS power of speckle-noise patterns observed at the image detection array;

Fig. 1I16B is a high-level flow chart setting forth the primary steps involved in practicing the third generalized method of reducing observable speckle-noise patterns in PLIIM-based systems, illustrated in Figs. 1I16 and 1I16A;

Fig. 1I17A is a perspective view of an optical assembly comprising a PLIA with a cylindrical lens array, and an electrically-passive PLIB modulation mechanism realized by a high-speed laser beam temporal phase modulation structure (e.g. optically reflective wavefront modulating cavity such as an etalon) arranged in front of each VLD within the PLIA, wherein the transmitted PLIB is temporal phase modulated according to a temporal phase modulation function (TPMF), modulating the temporal phase of the wavefront of the transmitted PLIB (i.e. by an amount exceeding the coherence time length of the VLD) and producing numerous substantially different time-varying speckle-noise patterns at image detection array of the IFD Subsystem during the photo-integration time period thereof, which are temporally and spatially averaged during the photo-integration time period thereof, thereby reducing the speckle-noise patterns observed at the image detection array;

Fig. 1I17B is a schematic representation, taken along the cross-section of the optical assembly shown in Fig. 1I17A, showing the optical path which each temporally-phased PLIB component within the PLIB travels on its way towards the target object to be illuminated;

Fig. 1I17C is a schematic representation of an optical assembly for reducing the RMS power of speckle-noise patterns in PLIIM-based systems, shown comprising a PLIA, a backlit transmissive-type phase-only LCD (PO-LCD) phase modulation panel, and a cylindrical lens array positioned closely thereto arranged as shown so that the wavefront of each planar laser illumination beam (PLIB) is temporal phase modulated as it is transmitted through the PO-LCD phase modulation panel, thereby producing numerous substantially different time-varying speckle-noise patterns at the image detection array of the IFD Subsystem during the photo-integration time period of the image detection array thereof, which are temporally and spatially averaged during the photo-integration time period thereof, thereby reducing the RMS power of speckle-noise patterns observed at the image detection array;

Fig. 1I17D is a schematic representation of an optical assembly for reducing the RMS power of speckle-noise patterns in PLIIM-based systems, shown comprising a PLIA, a high-density fiber optical array panel, and a cylindrical lens array positioned closely thereto arranged as shown so that the wavefront of each planar laser illumination beam (PLIB) is temporal phase modulated as it is transmitted through the fiber optical array panel, producing numerous substantially different time-varying speckle-noise patterns at the image detection array of the IFD Subsystem during the photo-integration time period of the image detection array thereof, which are temporally and spatially averaged during the photo-integration time period thereof, thereby reducing the RMS power of speckle-noise patterns observed at the image detection array;

Fig. 1I17E is a plan view of the optical assembly shown in Fig. 1I17D, showing the optical path of the PLIB components through the fiber optical array panel during the temporal phase modulation of the wavefront of the PLIB;

Fig. 1I18 is a schematic of the PLIIM system of Fig. 1A embodying a fourth generalized method of reducing the RMS power of observable speckle-noise patterns, wherein the planar laser illumination beam (PLIB) produced from the PLIIM system is temporal frequency modulated by a temporal frequency modulation function (TFMF) prior to object illumination, so that the target object (e.g. package) is illuminated with a temporally coherent-reduced laser beam and, as a result, numerous substantially different time-varying speckle-noise patterns are produced and detected over the photo-integration time period of the image detection array, thereby allowing the speckle-noise patterns to be temporally averaged over the photo-integration time period and/or spatially averaged over the image detection element and the observable speckle-noise pattern reduced;

Fig. 1I18A is a schematic representation of the PLIIM-based system of Fig. 1I18, illustrating the fourth generalized speckle-noise pattern reduction method of the present invention applied to the planar laser illumination array (PLIA) employed therein, wherein numerous substantially different speckle-noise patterns are produced at the image detection array during the photo-integration time period thereof using temporal frequency modulation techniques to modulate the phase along the wavefront of the PLIB, and temporally and spatially averaged at the image detection array during the photo-integration time period thereof, thereby reducing the RMS power of speckle-noise patterns observed at the image detection array;

Fig. 1I18B is a high-level flow chart setting forth the primary steps involved in practicing the fourth generalized method of reducing observable speckle-noise patterns in PLIIM-based systems, illustrated in Figs. 1I18 and 1I18A;

Fig. 1I19A is a perspective view of an optical assembly comprising a PLIA embodying a plurality of visible laser diodes (VLDs), each arranged behind a cylindrical lens, and driven by electrical current [illegible] high-frequency modulation signal so that (i) the transmitted PLIB is temporally frequency modulated according to a temporal frequency modulation function (TFMF), modulating the temporal frequency characteristics of the PLIB and thereby producing numerous substantially different speckle-noise patterns at image detection array of the IFD Subsystem during the photo-integration time period thereof, which are temporally and spatially averaged at the image detection during the photo-integration time period thereof, thereby reducing the RMS power of observable speckle-noise patterns;

Fig. 1I19B is a plan, partial cross-sectional view of the optical assembly shown in Fig. 1I19B;

Fig. 1I20 is a schematic representation of the PLIIM-based system of Fig. 1A embodying a fifth generalized method of reducing the RMS power of observable speckle-noise patterns, wherein the planar laser illumination beam (PLIB) transmitted towards the target object to be illuminated is spatial intensity modulated by a spatial intensity modulation function (SIMF), so that the object (e.g. package) is illuminated with spatially coherent-reduced laser beam and, as a result, numerous substantially different time-varying speckle-noise patterns are produced and detected over the photo-integration time period of the image detection array, thereby allowing the numerous speckle-noise patterns to be temporally averaged over the photo-integration time period and spatially averaged over the image detection element and the RMS power of the observable speckle-noise pattern reduced;

Fig. 1I20A is a schematic representation of the PLIIM-based system of Fig. 1I20, illustrating the fifth generalized speckle-noise pattern reduction method of the present invention applied at the IFD Subsystem employed therein, wherein numerous substantially different speckle-noise patterns are produced at the image detection array during the photo-

integration time period thereof using spatial intensity modulation techniques to modulate the spatial intensity along the wavefront of the PLIB, and temporally and spatially averaged at the image detection array during the photo-integration time period thereof, thereby reducing the RMS power of speckle-noise patterns observed at the image detection array;

Fig. 1I20B is a high-level flow chart setting forth the primary steps involved in practicing the fifth generalized method of reducing the RMS power of observable speckle-noise patterns in PLIIM-based systems, illustrated in Figs. 1I20 and 1I20A;

Fig. 1I21A is a perspective view of an optical assembly comprising a planar laser illumination array (PLIA) with a refractive-type cylindrical lens array, and an electronically-controlled mechanism for micro-oscillating before the cylindrical lens array, a pair of spatial intensity modulation panels with elements parallelly arranged at a high spatial frequency, having grey-scale transmittance measures, and driven by two pairs of ultrasonic transducers arranged in a push-pull configuration so that the transmitted planar laser illumination beam (PLIB) is spatially intensity modulated along its wavefront thereby producing numerous (i.e., many) substantially different time-varying speckle-noise patterns at the image detection array of the IFD Subsystem during the photo-integration time period thereof, which can be temporally and spatially averaged at the image detection array during the photo-integration time period thereof, thereby reducing the RMS power of the speckle-noise patterns observed at the image detection array;

Fig. 1I21B is a perspective view of the pair of spatial intensity modulation panels employed in the optical assembly shown in Fig. 1I21A;

Fig. 1I21C is a perspective view of the spatial intensity modulation panel support frame employed in the optical assembly shown in Fig. 1I21A;

Fig. 1I21D is a schematic representation of the dual spatial intensity modulation panel structure employed in Fig. 1I21A, shown configured between two pairs of ultrasonic transducers (or flexural elements driven by voice-coil type devices) operated in a push-pull mode of operation, so that at least one spatial intensity modulation panel is constantly moving when the other panel is momentarily stationary during modulation panel direction reversal;

Fig. 1I22 is a schematic representation of the PLIIM-based system of Fig. 1A embodying a sixth generalized method of reducing the RMS power of observable speckle-noise patterns, wherein the planar laser illumination beam (PLIB) reflected/scattered from the illuminated object and received at the IFD Subsystem is spatial intensity modulated according to a spatial intensity modulation function (SIMF), so that the object (e.g. package) is illuminated with a spatially coherent-reduced laser beam and, as a result, numerous substantially different time-varying (random) speckle-noise patterns are produced and detected over the photo-integration time period of the image detection array, thereby allowing the speckle-noise patterns to be

temporally averaged over the photo-integration time period and spatially averaged over the image detection element and the observable speckle-noise pattern reduced;

Fig. 1I22A is a schematic representation of the PLIIM-based system of Fig. 1I20, illustrating the sixth generalized speckle-noise pattern reduction method of the present invention applied at the IFD Subsystem employed therein, wherein numerous substantially different speckle-noise patterns are produced at the image detection array during the photo-integration time period thereof by spatial intensity modulating the wavefront of the received/scattered PLIB, and the time-varying speckle-noise patterns are temporally and spatially averaged at the image detection array during the photo-integration time period thereof, to thereby reduce the RMS power of speckle-noise patterns observed at the image detection array;

Fig. 1I22B is a high-level flow chart setting forth the primary steps involved in practicing the sixth generalized method of reducing observable speckle-noise patterns in PLIIM-based systems, illustrated in Figs. 1I20 and 1I21A;

Fig. 1I23A is a schematic representation of a first illustrative embodiment of the PLIIM-based system shown in Fig. 1I20, wherein an electro-optical mechanism is used to generate a rotating maltese-cross aperture (or other spatial intensity modulation plate) disposed before the pupil of the IFD Subsystem, so that the wavefront of the return PLIB is spatial-intensity modulated at the IFD subsystem in accordance with the principles of the present invention;

Fig. 1I22B is a schematic representation of a second illustrative embodiment of the system shown in Fig. 1I20, wherein an electro-mechanical mechanism is used to generate a rotating maltese-cross aperture (or other spatial intensity modulation plate) disposed before the pupil of the IFD Subsystem, so that the wavefront of the return PLIB is spatial intensity modulated at the IFD subsystem in accordance with the principles of the present invention;

Fig. 1I24 is a schematic representation of the PLIIM-based system of Fig. 1A illustrating the seventh generalized method of reducing the RMS power of observable speckle-noise patterns, wherein the wavefront of the planar laser illumination beam (PLIB) reflected/scattered from the illuminated object and received at the IFD Subsystem is temporal intensity modulated according to a temporal-intensity modulation function (TIMF), thereby producing numerous substantially different time-varying (random) speckle-noise patterns which are detected over the photo-integration time period of the image detection array, thereby reducing the RMS power of observable speckle-noise patterns;

Fig. 1I24A is a schematic representation of the PLIIM-based system of Fig. 1I24, illustrating the seventh generalized speckle-noise pattern reduction method of the present invention applied at the IFD Subsystem employed therein, wherein numerous substantially different time-varying speckle-noise patterns are produced at the image detection array during

the photo-integration time period thereof by modulating the temporal intensity of the wavefront of the received/scattered PLIB, and the time-varying speckle-noise patterns are temporally and spatially averaged at the image detection array during the photo-integration time period thereof, thereby reducing the RMS power of speckle-noise patterns observed at the image detection array;

Fig. 1I24B is a high-level flow chart setting forth the primary steps involved in practicing the seventh generalized method of reducing observable speckle-noise patterns in PLIM-based systems, illustrated in Figs. 1I24 and 1I24A;

Fig. 1I25C is a schematic representation of an illustrative embodiment of the PLIM-based system shown in Fig. 1I24, wherein is used to carry out wherein a high-speed electro-optical temporal intensity modulation panel, mounted before the imaging optics of the IFD subsystem, is used to temporal intensity modulate the wavefront of the return PLIB at the IFD subsystem in accordance with the principles of the present invention;

Fig. 1I25A1 is a perspective view of a PLIIM-based system of the present invention embodying an speckle-pattern noise reduction subsystem, comprising (i) an image formation and detection (IFD) module mounted on an optical bench and having a linear (1D) CCD image sensor with vertically-elongated image detection elements characterized by a large height-to-width (H/W) aspect ratio, (ii) a pair of planar laser illumination modules (PLIMs) mounted on the optical bench on opposite sides of the IFD module, and (iii) a 2-D PLIB micro-oscillation mechanism arranged with each PLIM, and employing a micro-oscillating cylindrical lens array as shown in Figs. 1I4A through 1I4D and a micro-oscillating PLIB reflecting mirror configured together as an optical assembly for the purpose of micro-oscillating the PLIB laterally along its planar extent as well as transversely along the direction orthogonal thereto, so that during illumination operations, the PLIB wavefront is spatial phase modulated along the planar extent thereof as well as along the direction orthogonal thereto, causing numerous substantially different time-varying speckle-noise patterns to be produced at the vertically-elongated image detection elements of the IFD Subsystem during the photo-integration time period thereof, which are temporally and spatially averaged during the photo-integration time period of the image detection array, thereby reducing the RMS power level of speckle-noise patterns observed at the image detection array;

Fig. 1I25A2 is an elevated side view of the PLIIM-based system of Fig. 1I25A1, showing the optical path traveled by the planar laser illumination beam (PLIB) produced from one of the PLIMs during object illumination operations, as the PLIB is micro-oscillated in orthogonal dimensions by the 2-D PLIB micro-oscillation mechanism, in relation to the field of view (FOV) of each image detection element employed in the IFD subsystem of the PLIIM-based system;

Fig. 1I25B1 is a perspective view of a PLIIM-based system of the present invention embodying an speckle-pattern noise reduction subsystem, comprising (i) an image formation and detection (IFD) module mounted on an optical bench and having a linear (1D) CCD image sensor with vertically-elongated image detection elements characterized by a large height-to-width (H/W) aspect ratio, (ii) a pair of planar laser illumination modules (PLIMs) mounted on the optical bench on opposite sides of the IFD module, and (iii) a 2-D PLIB micro-oscillation mechanism arranged with each PLIM, and employing a stationary PLIB folding mirror, a micro-oscillating PLIB reflecting element, and a stationary cylindrical lens array as shown in Figs. 1I5A through 1I5D configured together as an optical assembly as shown for the purpose of micro-oscillating the PLIB laterally along its planar extent as well as transversely along the direction orthogonal thereto, so that during illumination operations, the PLIB transmitted from each PLIM is spatial phase modulated along the planar extent thereof as well as along the direction orthogonal thereto, causing numerous substantially different time-varying speckle-noise patterns to be produced at the vertically-elongated image detection elements of the IFD Subsystem during the photo-integration time period thereof, which are temporally and spatially averaged during the photo-integration time period of the image detection array, thereby reducing the RMS power level of speckle-noise patterns observed at the image detection array;

Fig. 1I125B2 is an elevated side view of the PLIIM-based system of Fig. 1I25B1, showing the optical path traveled by the PLIB produced from one of the PLIMs during object illumination operations, as the PLIB is micro-oscillated in orthogonal dimensions by the 2-D PLIB micro-oscillation mechanism, in relation to the field of view (FOV) of each image detection element in the IFD subsystem of the PLIIM-based system;

Fig. 1I125C1 is a perspective view of a PLIIM-based system of the present invention embodying an speckle-pattern noise reduction subsystem, comprising (i) an image formation and detection (IFD) module mounted on an optical bench and having a linear (1D) CCD image sensor with vertically-elongated image detection elements characterized by a large height-to-width (H/W) aspect ratio, (ii) a pair of planar laser illumination modules (PLIMs) mounted on the optical bench on opposite sides of the IFD module, and (iii) a 2-D PLIB micro-oscillation mechanism arranged with each PLIM, and employing a micro-oscillating cylindrical lens array as shown in Figs. 1I6A through 1I6B and a micro-oscillating PLIB reflecting element configured together as shown as an optical assembly for the purpose of micro-oscillating the PLIB laterally along its planar extent as well as transversely along the direction orthogonal thereto, so that during illumination operations, the PLIB transmitted from each PLIM is spatial phase modulated along the planar extent thereof as well as along the direction orthogonal (i.e. transverse) thereto, causing numerous substantially different time-varying speckle-noise patterns to be produced at the vertically-elongated image detection elements of the IFD

Subsystem during the photo-integration time period thereof, which are temporally and spatially averaged during the photo-integration time period of the image detection array, thereby reducing the RMS power level of speckle-noise patterns observed at the image detection array;

Fig. 1I25C2 is an elevated side view of the PLIIM-based system of Fig. 1I25C1, showing the optical path traveled by the PLIB produced from one of the PLIMs during object illumination operations, as the PLIB is micro-oscillated in orthogonal dimensions by the 2-D PLIB micro-oscillation mechanism, in relation to the field of view (FOV) of each image detection element in the IFD subsystem of the PLIIM-based system;

Fig. 1I25D1 is a perspective view of a PLIIM-based system of the present invention embodying an speckle-pattern noise reduction subsystem, comprising (i) an image formation and detection (IFD) module mounted on an optical bench and having a linear (1D) CCD image sensor with vertically-elongated image detection elements characterized by a large height-to-width (H/W) aspect ratio, (ii) a pair of planar laser illumination modules (PLIMs) mounted on the optical bench on opposite sides of the IFD module, and (iii) a 2-D PLIB micro-oscillation mechanism arranged with each PLIM, and employing a micro-oscillating high-resolution deformable mirror structure as shown in Figs. 1I7A through 1I7C, a stationary PLIB reflecting element and a stationary cylindrical lens array configured together as an optical assembly as shown for the purpose of micro-oscillating the PLIB laterally along its planar extent as well as transversely along the direction orthogonal thereto, so that during illumination operation, the PLIB transmitted from each PLIM is spatial phase modulated along the planar extent thereof as well as along the direction orthogonal (i.e. transverse) thereto, causing numerous substantially different time-varying speckle-noise patterns to be produced at the vertically-elongated image detection elements of the IFD Subsystem during the photo-integration time period thereof, which are temporally and spatially averaged during the photo-integration time period of the image detection array, thereby reducing the RMS power level of speckle-noise patterns observed at the image detection array;

Fig. 1I25D2 is an elevated side view of the PLIIM-based system of Fig. 1I25D1, showing the optical path traveled by the PLIB produced from one of the PLIMs during object illumination operations, as the PLIB is micro-oscillated in orthogonal dimensions by the 2-D PLIB micro-oscillation mechanism, in relation to the field of view (FOV) of each image detection element in the IFD subsystem of the PLIIM-based system;

Fig. 1I25E1 is a perspective view of a PLIIM-based system of the present invention embodying an speckle-pattern noise reduction subsystem, comprising (i) an image formation and detection (IFD) module mounted on an optical bench and having a linear (1D) CCD image sensor with vertically-elongated image detection elements characterized by a large height-to-width (H/W) aspect ratio, (ii) a pair of planar laser illumination modules (PLIMs) mounted on

the optical bench on opposite sides of the IFD module, and (iii) a 2-D PLIB micro-oscillation mechanism arranged with each PLIM, and employing a micro-oscillating cylindrical lens array structure as shown in Figs. 1I3A through 1I4D for micro-oscillating the PLIB laterally along its planar extend, a micro-oscillating PLIB/FOV refraction element for micro-oscillating the PLIB and the field of view (FOV) of the linear CCD image sensor transversely along the direction orthogonal to the planar extent of the PLIB, and a stationary PLIB/FOV folding mirror configured together as an optical assembly as shown for the purpose of micro-oscillating the PLIB laterally along its planar extent while micro-oscillating both the PLIB and FOV of the linear CCD image sensor transversely along the direction orthogonal thereto, so that during illumination operation, the PLIB transmitted from each PLIM is spatial phase modulated along the planar extent thereof as well as along the direction orthogonal (i.e. transverse) thereto, causing numerous substantially different time-varying speckle-noise patterns to be produced at the vertically-elongated image detection elements of the IFD Subsystem during the photo-integration time period thereof, which are temporally and spatially averaged during the photo-integration time period of the image detection array, thereby reducing the RMS power level of speckle-noise patterns observed at the image detection array;

Fig. 1I25E2 is an elevated side view of the PLIIM-based system of Fig. 1I25E1, showing the optical path traveled by the PLIB produced from one of the PLIMs during object illumination operations, as the PLIB is micro-oscillated in orthogonal dimensions by the 2-D PLIB micro-oscillation mechanism, in relation to the field of view (FOV) of each image detection element in the IFD subsystem of the PLIIM-based system;

Fig. 1I25F1 is a perspective view of a PLIIM-based system of the present invention embodying an speckle-pattern noise reduction subsystem, comprising (i) an image formation and detection (IFD) module mounted on an optical bench and having a linear (1D) CCD image sensor with vertically-elongated image detection elements characterized by a large height-to-width (H/W) aspect ratio, (ii) a pair of planar laser illumination modules (PLIMs) mounted on the optical bench on opposite sides of the IFD module, and (iii) a 2-D PLIB micro-oscillation mechanism arranged with each PLIM, and employing a micro-oscillating cylindrical lens array structure as shown in Figs. 1I3A through 1I4D for micro-oscillating the PLIB laterally along its planar extend, a micro-oscillating PLIB/FOV reflection element for micro-oscillating the PLIB and the field of view (FOV)of the linear CCD image sensor transversely along the direction orthogonal to the planar extent of the PLIB, and a stationary PLIB/FOV folding mirror configured together as an optical assembly as shown for the purpose of micro-oscillating the PLIB laterally along its planar extent while micro-oscillating both the PLIB and FOV of the linear CCD image sensor transversely along the direction orthogonal thereto, so that during illumination operation, the PLIB transmitted from each PLIM is spatial phase modulated along

the planar extent thereof as well as along the direction orthogonal thereto, causing numerous substantially different time-varying speckle-noise patterns to be produced at the vertically-elongated image detection elements of the IFD Subsystem during the photo-integration time period thereof, which are temporally and spatially averaged during the photo-integration time period of the image detection array, thereby reducing the RMS power level of speckle-noise patterns observed at the image detection array;

Fig. 1I25F2 is an elevated side view of the PLIIM-based system of Fig. 1I25F1, showing the optical path traveled by the PLIB produced from one of the PLIMs during object illumination operations, as the PLIB is micro-oscillated in orthogonal dimensions by the 2-D PLIB micro-oscillation mechanism, in relation to the field of view (FOV) of each image detection element in the IFD subsystem of the PLIIM-based system;

Fig. 1I25G1 is a perspective view of a PLIIM-based system of the present invention embodying an speckle-pattern noise reduction subsystem, comprising (i) an image formation and detection (IFD) module mounted on an optical bench and having a linear (1D) CCD image sensor with vertically-elongated image detection elements characterized by a large height-to-width (H/W) aspect ratio, (ii) a pair of planar laser illumination modules (PLIMs) mounted on the optical bench on opposite sides of the IFD module, and (iii) a 2-D PLIB micro-oscillation mechanism arranged with each PLIM, and employing a phase-only LCD phase modulation panel as shown in Figs. 1I8F and 1IG, a stationary cylindrical lens array, and a micro-oscillating PLIB reflection element, configured together as an optical assembly as shown for the purpose of micro-oscillating the PLIB laterally along its planar extent while micro-oscillating the PLIB transversely along the direction orthogonal thereto, so that during illumination operations, the PLIB transmitted from each PLIM is spatial phase modulated along the planar extent thereof as well as along the direction orthogonal (i.e. transverse) thereto, causing numerous substantially different time-varying speckle-noise patterns are produced at the vertically-elongated image detection elements of the IFD Subsystem during the photo-integration time period thereof, which are temporally and spatially averaged during the photo-integration time period of the image detection array, thereby reducing the RMS power level of speckle-noise patterns observed at the image detection array;

Fig. 1I25G2 is an elevated side view of the PLIIM-based system of Fig. 1I25G1, showing the optical path traveled by the PLIB produced from one of the PLIMs during object illumination operations, as the PLIB is micro-oscillated in orthogonal dimensions by the 2-D PLIB micro-oscillation mechanism, in relation to the field of view (FOV) of each image detection element in the IFD subsystem of the PLIIM-based system;

Fig. 1I25H1 is a perspective view of a PLIIM-based system of the present invention embodying an speckle-pattern noise reduction subsystem, comprising (i) an image formation

and detection (IFD) module mounted on an optical bench and having a linear (1D) CCD image sensor with vertically-elongated image detection elements characterized by a large height-to-width (H/W) aspect ratio, (ii) a pair of planar laser illumination modules (PLIMs) mounted on the optical bench on opposite sides of the IFD module, and (iii) a 2-D PLIB micro-oscillation mechanism arranged with each PLIM, and employing a micro-oscillating multi-faceted cylindrical lens array structure as shown in Figs. 1I12A and 1I12B, a stationary cylindrical lens array, and a micro-oscillating PLIB reflection element configured together as an optical assembly as shown, for the purpose of micro-oscillating the PLIB laterally along its planar extent while micro-oscillating the PLIB transversely along the direction orthogonal thereto, so that during illumination operations, the PLIB transmitted from each PLIM is spatial phase modulated along the planar extent thereof as well as along the direction orthogonal thereto, causing numerous substantially different time-varying speckle-noise patterns are produced at the vertically-elongated image detection elements of the IFD Subsystem during the photo-integration time period thereof, which are temporally and spatially averaged during the photo-integration time period of the image detection array, thereby reducing the RMS power level of speckle-noise patterns observed at the image detection array;

Fig. 1I25H2 is an elevated side view of the PLIIM-based system of Fig. 1I25H1, showing the optical path traveled by the PLIB produced from one of the PLIMs during object illumination operations, as the PLIB is micro-oscillated in orthogonal dimensions by the 2-D PLIB micro-oscillation mechanism, in relation to the field of view (FOV) of each image detection element in the IFD subsystem of the PLIIM-based system;

Fig. 1I25I1 is a perspective view of a PLIIM-based system of the present invention embodying an speckle-pattern noise reduction subsystem, comprising (i) an image formation and detection (IFD) module mounted on an optical bench and having a linear (1D) CCD image sensor with vertically-elongated image detection elements characterized by a large height-to-width (H/W) aspect ratio, (ii) a pair of planar laser illumination modules (PLIMs) mounted on the optical bench on opposite sides of the IFD module, and (iii) a 2-D PLIB micro-oscillation mechanism arranged with each PLIM, and employing a micro-oscillating multi-faceted cylindrical lens array structure as generally shown in Figs. 1I12A and 1I12B (adapted for micro-oscillation about the optical axis of the VLD's laser illumination beam and along the planar extent of the PLIB) and a stationary cylindrical lens array, configured together as an optical assembly as shown, for the purpose of micro-oscillating the PLIB laterally along its planar extent while micro-oscillating the PLIB transversely along the direction orthogonal thereto, so that during illumination operations, the PLIB transmitted from each PLIM is spatial phase modulated along the planar extent thereof as well as along the direction orthogonal thereto, causing numerous substantially different time-varying speckle-noise patterns to be produced at

the vertically-elongated image detection elements of the IFD Subsystem during the photo-integration time period thereof, which are temporally and spatially averaged during the photo-integration time period of the image detection array, thereby reducing the RMS power level of speckle-noise patterns observed at the image detection array;

Fig. 1I25I2 is a perspective view of one of the PLIMs in the PLIIM-based system of Fig. 1I25I1, showing in greater detail that its multi-faceted cylindrical lens array structure micro-oscillates about the optical axis of the laser beam produced by the VLD, as the multi-faceted cylindrical lens array structure micro-oscillates about its longitudinal axis during laser beam illumination operations;

Fig. 1I25I3 is a view of the PLIM employed in Fig. 1I25I2, taken along line 1I25I2-1I25I3 thereof;

Fig. 1I25J1 is a perspective view of a PLIIM-based system of the present invention embodying an speckle-pattern noise reduction subsystem, comprising (i) an image formation and detection (IFD) module mounted on an optical bench and having a linear (1D) CCD image sensor with vertically-elongated image detection elements characterized by a large height-to-width (H/W) aspect ratio, (ii) a pair of planar laser illumination modules (PLIMs) mounted on the optical bench on opposite sides of the IFD module, and (iii) a hybrid-type PLIB modulation mechanism arranged with each PLIM, and employing a temporal intensity modulation panel as shown in Figs. 1I14A and 1I14B, a stationary cylindrical lens array, and a micro-oscillating PLIB reflection element configured together as an optical assembly as shown, for the purpose of temporal intensity modulating the PLIB uniformly along its planar extent while micro-oscillating the PLIB transversely along the direction orthogonal thereto, so that during illumination operations, the PLIB transmitted from each PLIIM is temporal intensity modulated along the planar extent thereof and temporal phase modulated during micro-oscillation along the direction orthogonal thereto, thereby producing numerous substantially different time-varying speckle-noise patterns at the vertically-elongated image detection elements of the IFD Subsystem during the photo-integration time period thereof, which are temporally and spatially averaged during the photo-integration time period of the image detection array, thereby reducing the RMS power level of speckle-noise patterns observed at the image detection array;

Fig. 1I25J2 is an elevated side view of the PLIIM-based system of Fig. 1I25J1, showing the optical path traveled by the PLIB produced from one of the PLIMs during object illumination operations, as the PLIB is modulated by the PLIB modulation mechanism, in relation to the field of view (FOV) of each image detection element in the IFD subsystem of the PLIIM-based system;

Fig. 1I25K1 is a perspective view of a PLIIM-based system of the present invention embodying an speckle-pattern noise reduction subsystem, comprising (i) an image formation

and detection (IFD) module mounted on an optical bench and having a linear (1D) CCD image sensor with vertically-elongated image detection elements characterized by a large height-to-width (H/W) aspect ratio, (ii) a pair of planar laser illumination modules (PLIMs) mounted on the optical bench on opposite sides of the IFD module, and (iii) a hybrid-type PLIB modulation mechanism arranged with each PLIM, and employing an optically-reflective external cavity (i.e. etalon) as shown in Figs. 1I17A and 1I17B, a stationary cylindrical lens array, and a micro-oscillating PLIB reflection element configured together as an optical assembly as shown, for the purpose of temporal phase modulating the PLIB uniformly along its planar extent while micro-oscillating the PLIB transversely along the direction orthogonal thereto, so that during illumination operations, the PLIB transmitted from each PLIM is temporal phase modulated along the planar extent thereof and spatial phase modulated during micro-oscillation along the direction orthogonal thereto, thereby producing numerous substantially different time-varying speckle-noise patterns at the vertically-elongated image detection elements of the IFD Subsystem during the photo-integration time period thereof, which are temporally and spatially averaged during the photo-integration time period of the image detection array, thereby reducing the RMS power level of speckle-noise patterns observed at the image detection array;

Fig. 1I25K2 is an elevated side view of the PLIIM-based system of Fig. 1I25K1, showing the optical path traveled by the PLIB produced from one of the PLIMs during object illumination operations, as the PLIB is modulated by the PLIB modulation mechanism, in relation to the field of view (FOV) of each image detection element in the IFD subsystem of the PLIIM-based system;

Fig. 1I25L1 is a perspective view of a PLIIM-based system of the present invention embodying an speckle-pattern noise reduction subsystem, comprising (i) an image formation and detection (IFD) module mounted on an optical bench and having a linear (1D) CCD image sensor with vertically-elongated image detection elements characterized by a large height-to-width (H/W) aspect ratio, (ii) a pair of planar laser illumination modules (PLIMs) mounted on the optical bench on opposite sides of the IFD module, and (iii) a hybrid-type PLIB modulation mechanism arranged with each PLIM, and employing a visible mode-locked laser diode (MLLD) as shown in Figs. 1I15A and 1I15B, a stationary cylindrical lens array, and a micro-oscillating PLIB reflection element configured together as an optical assembly as shown, for the purpose of producing a temporal intensity modulated PLIB while micro-oscillating the PLIB transversely along the direction orthogonal to its planar extent, so that during illumination operations, the PLIB transmitted from each PLIM is temporal intensity modulated along the planar extent thereof and spatial phase modulated during micro-oscillation along the direction orthogonal thereto, thereby producing numerous substantially different time-varying speckle-noise patterns at the vertically-elongated image detection elements of the IFD Subsystem during

the photo-integration time period thereof, which are temporally and spatially averaged during the photo-integration time period of the image detection array, thereby reducing the RMS power level of speckle-noise patterns observed at the image detection array;

Fig. 1I25L2 is an elevated side view of the PLIIM-based system of Fig. 1I25L1, showing the optical path traveled by the PLIB produced from one of the PLIMs during object illumination operations, as the PLIB is modulated by the PLIB modulation mechanism, in relation to the field of view (FOV) of each image detection element in the IFD subsystem of the PLIIM-based system;

Fig. 1I25M1 is a perspective view of a PLIIM-based system of the present invention embodying an speckle-pattern noise reduction subsystem, comprising (i) an image formation and detection (IFD) module mounted on an optical bench and having a linear (1D) CCD image sensor with vertically-elongated image detection elements characterized by a large height-to-width (H/W) aspect ratio, (ii) a pair of planar laser illumination modules (PLIMs) mounted on the optical bench on opposite sides of the IFD module, and (iii) a hybrid-type PLIB modulation mechanism arranged with each PLIM, and employing a visible laser diode (VLD) driven into a high-speed frequency hopping mode (as shown in Figs. 1I19A and 1I19B), a stationary cylindrical lens array, and a micro-oscillating PLIB reflection element configured together as an optical assembly as shown, for the purpose of producing a temporal frequency modulated PLIB while micro-oscillating the PLIB transversely along the direction orthogonal to its planar extent, so that during illumination operations, the PLIB transmitted from each PLIM is temporal frequency modulated along the planar extent thereof and spatial-phase modulated during micro-oscillation along the direction orthogonal thereto, thereby producing numerous substantially different time-varying speckle-noise patterns at the vertically-elongated image detection elements of the IFD Subsystem during the photo-integration time period thereof, which are temporally and spatially averaged during the photo-integration time period of the image detection array, thereby reducing the RMS power level of speckle-noise patterns observed at the image detection array;

Fig. 1I25M2 is an elevated side view of the PLIIM-based system of Fig. 1I25M1, showing the optical path traveled by the PLIB produced from one of the PLIMs during object illumination operations, as the PLIB is modulated by the PLIB modulation mechanism, in relation to the field of view (FOV) of each image detection element in the IFD subsystem of the PLIIM-based system;

Fig. 1I25N1 is a perspective view of a PLIIM-based system of the present invention embodying an speckle-pattern noise reduction subsystem, comprising (i) an image formation and detection (IFD) module mounted on an optical bench and having a linear (1D) CCD image sensor with vertically-elongated image detection elements characterized by a large height-to-

width (H/W) aspect ratio, (ii) a pair of planar laser illumination modules (PLIMs) mounted on the optical bench on opposite sides of the IFD module, and (iii) a hybrid-type PLIB modulation mechanism arranged with each PLIM, and employing a micro-oscillating spatial intensity modulation array as shown in Figs. 1I21A through 1I21D, a stationary cylindrical lens array, and a micro-oscillating PLIB reflection element configured together as an optical assembly as shown, for the purpose of producing a spatial intensity modulated PLIB while micro-oscillating the PLIB transversely along the direction orthogonal to its planar extent, so that during illumination operations, the PLIB transmitted from each PLIM is spatial intensity modulated along the planar extent thereof and spatial phase modulated during micro-oscillation along the direction orthogonal thereto, thereby producing numerous substantially different time-varying speckle-noise patterns at the vertically-elongated image detection elements of the IFD Subsystem during the photo-integration time period thereof, which are temporally and spatially averaged during the photo-integration time period of the image detection array, thereby reducing the RMS power level of speckle-noise patterns observed at the image detection array;

Fig. 1I25N2 is an elevated side view of the PLIIM-based system of Fig. 1I25N2, showing the optical path traveled by the PLIB produced from one of the PLIMs during object illumination operations, as the PLIB is modulated by the PLIB modulation mechanism, in relation to the field of view (FOV) of each image detection element in the IFD subsystem of the PLIIM-based system;

Fig. 1K1 is a schematic representation illustrating how the field of view of a PLIIM-based system can be fixed to substantially match the scan field width thereof (measured at the top of the scan field) at a substantial distance above a conveyor belt;

Fig. 1K2 is a schematic representation illustrating how the field of view of a PLIIM-based system can be fixed to substantially match the scan field width of a low profile scanning field located slightly above the conveyor belt surface, by fixing the focal length of the imaging subsystem during the optical design stage;

Fig. 1L1 is a schematic representation illustrating how an arrangement of field of view (FOV) beam folding mirrors can be used to produce an expanded FOV that matches the geometrical characteristics of the scanning application at hand when the FOV emerges from the system housing;

Fig. 1L2 is a schematic representation illustrating how the fixed field of view (FOV) of an imaging subsystem can be expanded across a working space (e.g. conveyor belt structure) by rotating the FOV during object illumination and imaging operations;

Fig. 1M1 shows a data plot of pixel power density E_{pix} versus. object distance (r) calculated using the arbitrary but reasonable values $E_0 = 1\ W/m^2$, f = 80 mm and F = 4.5, demonstrating that, in a counter-intuitive manner, the power density at the pixel (and therefore

the power incident on the pixel, as its area remains constant) actually increases as the object distance increases;

Fig. 1M2 is a data plot of laser beam power density versus position along the planar laser beam width showing that the total output power in the planar laser illumination beam of the present invention is distributed along the width of the beam in a roughly Gaussian distribution;

Fig. 1M3 shows a plot of beam width length L versus object distance r calculated using a beam fan/spread angle $\theta = 50°$, demonstrating that the planar laser illumination beam width increases as a function of increasing object distance;

Fig. 1M4 is a typical data plot of planar laser beam height h versus image distance r for a planar laser illumination beam of the present invention focused at the farthest working distance in accordance with the principles of the present invention, demonstrating that the height dimension of the planar laser beam decreases as a function of increasing object distance;

Fig. 1N is a data plot of planar laser beam power density E_0 at the center of its beam width, plotted as a function of object distance, demonstrating that use of the laser beam focusing technique of the present invention, wherein the height of the planar laser illumination beam is decreased as the object distance increases, compensates for the increase in beam width in the planar laser illumination beam, which occurs for an increase in object distance, thereby yielding a laser beam power density on the target object which increases as a function of increasing object distance over a substantial portion of the object distance range of the PLIIM-based system;

Fig. 1O is a data plot of pixel power density E_0 vs. object distance, obtained when using a planar laser illumination beam whose beam height decreases with increasing object distance, and also a data plot of the "reference" pixel power density plot E_{pix} vs. object distance obtained when using a planar laser illumination beam whose beam height is substantially constant (e.g. 1 mm) over the entire portion of the object distance range of the PLIIM-based system;

Fig. 1P1 is a schematic representation of the composite power density characteristics associated with the planar laser illumination array in the PLIIM-based system of Fig. 1G1, taken at the "near field region" of the system, and resulting from the additive power density contributions of the individual visible laser diodes in the planar laser illumination array;

Fig. 1P2 is a schematic representation of the composite power density characteristics associated with the planar laser illumination array in the PLIIM-based system of Fig. 1G1, taken at the "far field region" of the system, and resulting from the additive power density contributions of the individual visible laser diodes in the planar laser illumination array;

Fig. 1Q1 is a schematic representation of second illustrative embodiment of the PLIIM-based system of the present invention shown in Fig. 1A, shown comprising a linear image

formation and detection module, and a pair of planar laser illumination arrays arranged in relation to the image formation and detection module such that the field of view thereof is oriented in a direction that is coplanar with the plane of the stationary planar laser illumination beams (PLIBs) produced by the planar laser illumination arrays (PLIAs) without using any laser beam or field of view folding mirrors;

Fig. 1Q2 is a block schematic diagram of the PLIIM-based system shown in Fig. 1Q1, comprising a linear image formation and detection module, a pair of planar laser illumination arrays, an image frame grabber, an image data buffer, an image processing computer, and a camera control computer;

Fig. 1R1 is a schematic representation of third illustrative embodiment of the PLIIM-based system of the present invention shown in Fig. 1A, shown comprising a linear image formation and detection module having a field of view, a pair of planar laser illumination arrays for producing first and second stationary planar laser illumination beams, and a pair of stationary planar laser beam folding mirrors arranged so as to fold the optical paths of the first and second planar laser illumination beams such that the planes of the first and second stationary planar laser illumination beams are in a direction that is coplanar with the field of view of the image formation and detection (IFD) module or subsystem;

Fig. 1R2 is a block schematic diagram of the PLIIM-based system shown in Fig. 1P1, comprising a linear image formation and detection module, a stationary field of view folding mirror, a pair of planar illumination arrays, a pair of stationary planar laser illumination beam folding mirrors, an image frame grabber, an image data buffer, an image processing computer, and a camera control computer;

Fig. 1S1 is a schematic representation of fourth illustrative embodiment of the PLIIM-based system of the present invention shown in Fig. 1A, shown comprising a linear image formation and detection module having a field of view (FOV), a stationary field of view (FOV) folding mirror for folding the field of view of the image formation and detection module, a pair of planar laser illumination arrays for producing first and second stationary planar laser illumination beams, and a pair of stationary planar laser illumination beam folding mirrors for folding the optical paths of the first and second stationary planar laser illumination beams so that planes of first and second stationary planar laser illumination beams are in a direction that is coplanar with the field of view of the image formation and detection module;

Fig. 1S2 is a block schematic diagram of the PLIIM-based system shown in Fig. 1S1, comprising a linear-type image formation and detection (IFD) module, a stationary field of view folding mirror, a pair of planar laser illumination arrays, a pair of stationary planar laser beam folding mirrors, an image frame grabber, an image data buffer, an image processing computer, and a camera control computer;

Fig. 1T is a schematic representation of an under-the-conveyor-belt package identification system embodying the PLIIM-based subsystem of Fig. 1A;

Fig. 1U is a schematic representation of a hand-supportable bar code symbol reading system embodying the PLIIM-based system of Fig. 1A;

Fig. 1V1 is a schematic representation of second generalized embodiment of the PLIIM-based system of the present invention, wherein a pair of planar laser illumination arrays (PLIAs) are mounted on opposite sides of a linear type image formation and detection (IFD) module having a field of view, such that the planar laser illumination arrays produce a plane of laser beam illumination (i.e. light) which is disposed substantially coplanar with the field of view of the image formation and detection module, and that the planar laser illumination beam and the field of view of the image formation and detection module move synchronously together while maintaining their coplanar relationship with each other as the planar laser illumination beam and FOV are automatically scanned over a 3-D region of space during object illumination and image detection operations;

Fig. 1V2 is a schematic representation of first illustrative embodiment of the PLIIM-based system of the present invention shown in Fig. 1V1, shown comprising an image formation and detection module having a field of view (FOV), a field of view (FOV) folding/sweeping mirror for folding the field of view of the image formation and detection module, a pair of planar laser illumination arrays for producing first and second planar laser illumination beams, and a pair of planar laser beam folding/sweeping mirrors, jointly or synchronously movable with the FOV folding/sweeping mirror, and arranged so as to fold and sweep the optical paths of the first and second planar laser illumination beams so that the folded field of view of the image formation and detection module is synchronously moved with the planar laser illumination beams in a direction that is coplanar therewith as the planar laser illumination beams are scanned over a 3-D region of space under the control of the camera control computer;

Fig. 1V3 is a block schematic diagram of the PLIIM-based system shown in Fig. 1V1, comprising a pair of planar laser illumination arrays, a pair of planar laser beam folding/sweeping mirrors, a linear-type image formation and detection module, a field of view folding/sweeping mirror, an image frame grabber, an image data buffer, an image processing computer, and a camera control computer;

Fig. 1V4 is a schematic representation of an over-the-conveyor-belt package identification system embodying the PLIIM-based system of Fig. 1V1;

Fig. 1V5 is a schematic representation of a presentation-type bar code symbol reading system embodying the PLIIM-based subsystem of Fig. 1V1;

Fig. 2A is a schematic representation of a third generalized embodiment of the PLIIM-based system of the present invention, wherein a pair of planar laser illumination arrays (PLIAs) are mounted on opposite sides of a linear (i.e. 1-dimensional) type image formation and detection (IFD) module having a fixed focal length imaging lens, a variable focal distance and a fixed field of view (FOV) so that the planar laser illumination arrays produce a plane of laser beam illumination which is disposed substantially coplanar with the field view of the image formation and detection module during object illumination and image detection operations carried out on bar code symbol structures and other graphical indicia which may embody information within its structure;

Fig. 2B1 is a schematic representation of a first illustrative embodiment of the PLIIM-based system shown in Fig. 2A, comprising an image formation and detection module having a field of view (FOV), and a pair of planar laser illumination arrays for producing first and second stationary planar laser illumination beams in an imaging direction that is coplanar with the field of view of the image formation and detection module;

Fig. 2B2 is a schematic representation of the PLIIM-based system of the present invention shown in Fig. 2B1, wherein the linear image formation and detection module is shown comprising a linear array of photo-electronic detectors realized using CCD technology, and each planar laser illumination array is shown comprising an array of planar laser illumination modules;

Fig. 2C1 is a block schematic diagram of the PLIIM-based system shown in Fig. 2B1, comprising a pair of planar illumination arrays, a linear-type image formation and detection module, an image frame grabber, an image data buffer, an image processing computer, and a camera control computer;

Fig. 2C2 is a schematic representation of the linear type image formation and detection (IFD) module employed in the PLIIM-based system shown in Fig. 2B1, wherein an imaging subsystem having a fixed focal length imaging lens, a variable focal distance and a fixed field of view is arranged on an optical bench, mounted within a compact module housing, and responsive to focus control signals generated by the camera control computer of the PLIIM-based system;

Fig. 2D1 is a schematic representation of the second illustrative embodiment of the PLIIM-based system of the present invention shown in Fig. 2A, shown comprising a linear image formation and detection module, a stationary field of view (FOV) folding mirror for folding the field of view of the image formation and detection module, and a pair of planar laser illumination arrays arranged in relation to the image formation and detection module such that the folded field of view is oriented in an imaging direction that is coplanar with the stationary planes of laser illumination produced by the planar laser illumination arrays;

Fig. 2D2 is a block schematic diagram of the PLIIM-based system shown in Fig. 2D1, comprising a pair of planar laser illumination arrays (PLIAs), a linear-type image formation and detection module, a stationary field of view of folding mirror, an image frame grabber, an image data buffer, an image processing computer, and a camera control computer;

Fig. 2D3 is a schematic representation of the linear type image formation and detection module (IFD) module employed in the PLIIM-based system shown in Fig. 2D1, wherein an imaging subsystem having a fixed focal length imaging lens, a variable focal distance and a fixed field of view is arranged on an optical bench, mounted within a compact module housing, and responsive to focus control signals generated by the camera control computer of the PLIIM-based system;

Fig. 2E1 is a schematic representation of the third illustrative embodiment of the PLIIM-based system of the present invention shown in Fig. 1A, shown comprising an image formation and detection module having a field of view (FOV), a pair of planar laser illumination arrays for producing first and second stationary planar laser illumination beams, a pair of stationary planar laser beam folding mirrors for folding the stationary (i.e. non-swept) planes of the planar laser illumination beams produced by the pair of planar laser illumination arrays, in an imaging direction that is coplanar with the stationary plane of the field of view of the image formation and detection module during system operation;

Fig. 2E2 is a block schematic diagram of the PLIIM-based system shown in Fig. 2B1, comprising a pair of planar laser illumination arrays, a linear image formation and detection module, a pair of stationary planar laser illumination beam folding mirrors, an image frame grabber, an image data buffer, an image processing computer, and a camera control computer;

Fig. 2E3 is a schematic representation of the linear image formation and detection (IFD) module employed in the PLIIM-based system shown in Fig. 2B1, wherein an imaging subsystem having fixed focal length imaging lens, a variable focal distance and a fixed field of view is arranged on an optical bench, mounted within a compact module housing, and responsive to focus control signals generated by the camera control computer of the PLIIM-based system;

Fig. 2F1 is a schematic representation of the fourth illustrative embodiment of the PLIIM-based system of the present invention shown in Fig. 2A, shown comprising a linear image formation and detection module having a field of view (FOV), a stationary field of view (FOV) folding mirror, a pair of planar laser illumination arrays for producing first and second stationary planar laser illumination beams, and a pair of stationary planar laser beam folding mirrors arranged so as to fold the optical paths of the first and second stationary planar laser illumination beams so that these planar laser illumination beams are oriented in an imaging

direction that is coplanar with the folded field of view of the linear image formation and detection module;

Fig. 2F2 is a block schematic diagram of the PLIIM-based system shown in Fig. 2F1, comprising a pair of planar illumination arrays, a linear image formation and detection module, a stationary field of view (FOV) folding mirror, a pair of stationary planar laser illumination beam folding mirrors, an image frame grabber, an image data buffer, an image processing computer, and a camera control computer;

Fig. 2F3 is a schematic representation of the linear-type image formation and detection (IFD) module employed in the PLIIM-based system shown in Fig. 2F1, wherein an imaging subsystem having a fixed focal length imaging lens, a variable focal distance and a fixed field of view is arranged on an optical bench, mounted within a compact module housing, and responsive to focus control signals generated by the camera control computer of the PLIIM-based system;

Fig. 2G is a schematic representation of an over-the-conveyor belt package identification system embodying the PLIIM-based system of Fig. 2A;

Fig. 2H is a schematic representation of a hand-supportable bar code symbol reading system embodying the PLIIM-based system of Fig. 2A;

Fig. 2I1 is a schematic representation of the fourth generalized embodiment of the PLIIM-based system of the present invention, wherein a pair of planar laser illumination arrays (PLIAs) are mounted on opposite sides of a linear image formation and detection (IFD) module having a fixed focal length imaging lens, a variable focal distance and fixed field of view (FOV), so that the planar illumination arrays produces a plane of laser beam illumination which is disposed substantially coplanar with the field view of the image formation and detection module and synchronously moved therewith while the planar laser illumination beams are automatically scanned over a 3-D region of space during object illumination and imaging operations;

Fig. 2I2 is a schematic representation of the first illustrative embodiment of the PLIIM-based system of the present invention shown in Fig. 2I1, shown comprising an image formation and detection module (i.e. camera) having a field of view (FOV), a FOV folding/sweeping mirror, a pair of planar laser illumination arrays for producing first and second planar laser illumination beams, and a pair of planar laser beam folding/sweeping mirrors, jointly movable with the FOV folding/sweeping mirror, and arranged so that the field of view of the image formation and detection module is coplanar with the folded planes of first and second planar laser illumination beams, and the coplanar FOV and planar laser illumination beams are synchronously moved together while the planar laser illumination beams and FOV are scanned

over a 3-D region of space containing a stationary or moving bar code symbol or other graphical structure (e.g. text) embodying information;

Fig. 2I3 is a block schematic diagram of the PLIIM-based system shown in Figs. 2I1 and 2I2, comprising a pair of planar illumination arrays, a linear image formation and detection module, a field of view (FOV) folding/sweeping mirror, a pair of planar laser illumination beam folding/sweeping mirrors jointly movable therewith, an image frame grabber, an image data buffer, an image processing computer, and a camera control computer;

Fig. 2I4 is a schematic representation of the linear type image formation and detection (IFD) module employed in the PLIIM-based system shown in Figs. 2I1 and 2I2, wherein an imaging subsystem having a fixed focal length imaging lens, a variable focal distance and a fixed field of view is arranged on an optical bench, mounted within a compact module housing, and responsive to focus control signals generated by the camera control computer of the PLIIM-based system;

Fig. 2I5 is a schematic representation of a hand-supportable bar code symbol reader embodying the PLIIM-based system of Fig. 2I1;

Fig. 2I6 is a schematic representation of a presentation-type bar code symbol reader embodying the PLIIM-based system of Fig. 2I1;

Fig. 3A is a schematic representation of a fifth generalized embodiment of the PLIIM-based system of the present invention, wherein a pair of planar laser illumination arrays (PLIAs) are mounted on opposite sides of a linear image formation and detection (IFD) module having a variable focal length imaging lens, a variable focal distance and a variable field of view, so that the planar laser illumination arrays produce a stationary plane of laser beam illumination (i.e. light) which is disposed substantially coplanar with the field view of the image formation and detection module during object illumination and image detection operations carried out on bar code symbols and other graphical indicia by the PLIIM-based system of the present invention;

Fig. 3B1 is a schematic representation of the first illustrative embodiment of the PLIIM-based system of the present invention shown in Fig. 3A, shown comprising an image formation and detection module, and a pair of planar laser illumination arrays arranged in relation to the image formation and detection module such that the stationary field of view thereof is oriented in an imaging direction that is coplanar with the stationary plane of laser illumination produced by the planar laser illumination arrays, without using any laser beam or field of view folding mirrors.

Fig. 3B2 is a schematic representation of the first illustrative embodiment of the PLIIM-based system shown in Fig. 3B1, wherein the linear image formation and detection module is shown comprising a linear array of photo-electronic detectors realized using CCD technology,

and each planar laser illumination array is shown comprising an array of planar laser illumination modules;

Fig. 3C1 is a block schematic diagram of the PLIIM-based shown in Fig. 3B1, comprising a pair of planar laser illumination arrays, a linear image formation and detection module, an image frame grabber, an image data buffer, an image processing computer, and a camera control computer;

Fig. 3C2 is a schematic representation of the linear type image formation and detection (IFD) module employed in the PLIIM-based system shown in Fig. 3B1, wherein an imaging subsystem having a 3-D variable focal length imaging lens, a variable focal distance and a variable field of view is arranged on an optical bench, mounted within a compact module housing, and responsive to zoom and focus control signals generated by the camera control computer of the PLIIM-based system;

Fig. 3D1 is a schematic representation of a first illustrative implementation of the IFD camera subsystem contained in the image formation and detection (IFD) module employed in the PLIIM-based system of Fig. 3B1, shown comprising a stationary lens system mounted before a stationary linear image detection array, a first movable lens system for large stepped movements relative to the stationary lens system during image zooming operations, and a second movable lens system for smaller stepped movements relative to the first movable lens system and the stationary lens system during image focusing operations;

Fig. 3D2 is an perspective partial view of the second illustrative implementation of the camera subsystem shown in Fig. 3C2, wherein the first movable lens system is shown comprising an electrical rotary motor mounted to a camera body, an arm structure mounted to the shaft of the motor, a slidable lens mount (supporting a first lens group) slidably mounted to a rail structure, and a linkage member pivotally connected to the slidable lens mount and the free end of the arm structure so that, as the motor shaft rotates, the slidable lens mount moves along the optical axis of the imaging optics supported within the camera body, and wherein the linear CCD image sensor chip employed in the camera is rigidly mounted to the camera body of a PLIIM-based system via a novel image sensor mounting mechanism which prevents any significant misalignment between the field of view (FOV) of the image detection elements on the linear CCD (or CMOS) image sensor chip and the planar laser illumination beam (PLIB) produced by the PLIA used to illuminate the FOV thereof within the IFD module (i.e. camera subsystem);

Fig. 3D3 is an elevated side view of the camera subsystem shown in Fig. 3D2;

Fig. 3D4 is a first perspective view of sensor heat sinking structure and camera PC board subassembly shown disattached from the camera body of the IFD module of Fig. 3D2, showing the IC package of the linear CCD image detection array (i.e. image sensor chip) rigidly

mounted to the heat sinking structure by a releasable image sensor chip fixture subassembly integrated with the heat sinking structure, preventing relative movement between the image sensor chip and the back plate of the heat sinking structure during thermal cycling, while the electrical connector pins of the image sensor chip are permitted to pass through four sets of apertures formed through the heat sinking structure and establish secure electrical connection with a matched electrical socket mounted on the camera PC board which, in turn, is mounted to the heat sinking structure in a manner which permits relative expansion and contraction between the camera PC board and heat sinking structure during thermal cycling;

Fig. 3D5 is a perspective view of the sensor heat sinking structure employed in the camera subsystem of Fig. 3D2, shown disattached from the camera body and camera PC board, to reveal the releasable image sensor chip fixture subassembly, including its chip fixture plates and spring-biased chip clamping pins, provided on the heat sinking structure of the present invention to prevent relative movement between the image sensor chip and the back plate of the heat sinking structure so that no significant misalignment will occur between the field of view (FOV) of the image detection elements on the image sensor chip and the planar laser illumination beam (PLIB) produced by the PLIA within the camera subsystem during thermal cycling;

Fig. 3D6 is a perspective view of the multi-layer camera PC board used in the camera subsystem of Fig. 3D2, shown disattached from the heat sinking structure and the camera body, and having an electrical socket adapted to receive the electrical connector pins of the image sensor chip which are passed through the four sets of apertures formed in the back plate of the heat sinking structure, while the image sensor chip package is rigidly fixed to the camera system body, via its heat sinking structure, in accordance with the principles of the present invention;

Fig. 3D7 is an elevated, partially cut-away side view of the camera subsystem of Fig. 3D2, showing that when the linear image sensor chip is mounted within the camera system in accordance with the principles of the present invention, the electrical connector pins of the image sensor chip are passed through the four sets of apertures formed in the back plate of the heat sinking structure, while the image sensor chip package is rigidly fixed to the camera system body, via its heat sinking structure, so that no significant relative movement between the image sensor chip and the heat sinking structure and camera body occurs during thermal cycling, thereby preventing any misalignment between the field of view (FOV) of the image detection elements on the image sensor chip and the planar laser illumination beam (PLIB) produced by the PLIA within the camera subsystem during planar laser illumination and imaging operations;

Fig. 3E1 is a schematic representation of the second illustrative embodiment of the PLIIM-based system of the present invention shown in Fig. 3A, shown comprising a linear image formation and detection module, a pair of planar laser illumination arrays, and a stationary field of view (FOV) folding mirror arranged in relation to the image formation and detection module such that the stationary field of view thereof is oriented in an imaging direction that is coplanar with the stationary plane of laser illumination produced by the planar laser illumination arrays, without using any planar laser illumination beam folding mirrors;

Fig. 3E2 is a block schematic diagram of the PLIIM-based system shown in Fig. 3E1, comprising a pair of planar illumination arrays, a linear image formation and detection module, a stationary field of view (FOV) folding mirror, an image frame grabber, an image data buffer, an image processing computer, and a camera control computer;

Fig. 3E3 is a schematic representation of the linear type image formation and detection module (IFDM) employed in the PLIIM-based system shown in Fig. 3E1, wherein an imaging subsystem having a variable focal length imaging lens, a variable focal distance and a variable field of view is arranged on an optical bench, mounted within a compact module housing, and responsive to zoom and focus control signals generated by the camera control computer of the PLIIM-based system;

Fig. 3E4 is a schematic representation of an exemplary realization of the PLIIM-based system of Fig. 3E1, shown comprising a compact housing, linear-type image formation and detection (i.e. camera) module, a pair of planar laser illumination arrays, and a field of view (FOV) folding mirror for folding the field of view of the image formation and detection module in a direction that is coplanar with the plane of composite laser illumination beam produced by the planar laser illumination arrays;

Fig. 3E5 is a plan view schematic representation of the PLIIM-based system of Fig. 3E4, taken along line 3E5-3E5 therein, showing the spatial extent of the field of view of the image formation and detection module in the illustrative embodiment of the present invention;

Fig. 3E6 is an elevated end view schematic representation of the PLIIM-based system of Fig. 3E4, taken along line 3E6-3E6 therein, showing the field of view of the linear image formation and detection module being folded in the downwardly imaging direction by the field of view folding mirror, and the planar laser illumination beam produced by each planar laser illumination module being directed in the imaging direction such that both the folded field of view and planar laser illumination beams are arranged in a substantially coplanar relationship during object illumination and imaging operations;

Fig. 3E7 is an elevated side view schematic representation of the PLIIM-based system of Fig. 3E4, taken along line 3E7-3E7 therein, showing the field of view of the linear image formation and detection module being folded in the downwardly imaging direction by the field

of view folding mirror, and the planar laser illumination beam produced by each planar laser illumination module being directed along the imaging direction such that both the folded field of view and stationary planar laser illumination beams are arranged in a substantially coplanar relationship during object illumination and image detection operations;

Fig. 3E8 is an elevated side view of the PLIIM-based system of Fig. 3E4, showing the spatial limits of the variable field of view (FOV) of its linear image formation and detection module when controllably adjusted to image the tallest packages moving on a conveyor belt structure, as well as the spatial limits of the variable FOV of the linear image formation and detection module when controllably adjusted to image objects having height values close to the surface height of the conveyor belt structure;

Fig. 3F1 is a schematic representation of the third illustrative embodiment of the PLIIM-based system of the present invention shown in Fig. 3A, shown comprising a linear image formation and detection module having a field of view (FOV), a pair of planar laser illumination arrays for producing first and second stationary planar laser illumination beams, a pair of stationary planar laser illumination beam folding mirrors arranged relative to the planar laser illumination arrays so as to fold the stationary planar laser illumination beams produced by the pair of planar illumination arrays in an imaging direction that is coplanar with stationary field of view of the image formation and detection module during illumination and imaging operations;

Fig. 3F2 is a block schematic diagram of the PLIIM-based system shown in Fig. 3F1, comprising a pair of planar illumination arrays, a linear image formation and detection module, a pair of stationary planar laser illumination beam folding mirrors, an image frame grabber, an image data buffer, an image processing computer, and a camera control computer;

Fig. 3F3 is a schematic representation of the linear type image formation and detection (IFD) module employed in the PLIIM-based system shown in Fig. 3F1, wherein an imaging subsystem having a variable focal length imaging lens, a variable focal distance and a variable field of view is arranged on an optical bench, mounted within a compact module housing, and is responsive to zoom and focus control signals generated by the camera control computer of the PLIIM-based system during illumination and imaging operations;

Fig. 3G1 is a schematic representation of the fourth illustrative embodiment of the PLIIM-based system of the present invention shown in Fig. 3A, shown comprising a linear image formation and detection (i.e. camera) module having a field of view (FOV), a pair of planar laser illumination arrays for producing first and second stationary planar laser illumination beams, a stationary field of view (FOV) folding mirror for folding the field of view of the image formation and detection module, and a pair of stationary planar laser beam folding mirrors arranged so as to fold the optical paths of the first and second planar laser illumination

beams such that stationary planes of first and second planar laser illumination beams are in an imaging direction which is coplanar with the field of view of the image formation and detection module during illumination and imaging operations;

Fig. 3G2 is a block schematic diagram of the PLIIM system shown in Fig. 3G1, comprising a pair of planar illumination arrays, a linear image formation and detection module, a stationary field of view (FOV) folding mirror, a pair of stationary planar laser illumination beam folding mirrors, an image frame grabber, an image data buffer, an image processing computer, and a camera control computer;

Fig. 3G3 is a schematic representation of the linear type image formation and detection module (IFDM) employed in the PLIIM-based system shown in Fig. 3G1, wherein an imaging subsystem having a variable focal length imaging lens, a variable focal distance and a variable field of view is arranged on an optical bench, mounted within a compact module housing, and responsive to zoom and focus control signals generated by the camera control computer of the PLIIM system during illumination and imaging operations;

Fig. 3H is a schematic representation of over-the-conveyor and side-of-conveyor belt package identification systems embodying the PLIIM-based system of Fig. 3A;

Fig. 3I is a schematic representation of a hand-supportable bar code symbol reading device embodying the PLIIM-based system of Fig. 3A;

Fig. 3J1 is a schematic representation of the sixth generalized embodiment of the PLIIM-based system of the present invention, wherein a pair of planar laser illumination arrays (PLIAs) are mounted on opposite sides of a linear image formation and detection (IFD) module having a variable focal length imaging lens, a variable focal distance and a variable field of view, so that the planar illumination arrays produce a plane of laser beam illumination which is disposed substantially coplanar with the field view of the image formation and detection module and synchronously moved therewith as the planar laser illumination beams are scanned across a 3-D region of space during object illumination and image detection operations;

Fig. 3J2 is a schematic representation of the first illustrative embodiment of the PLIIM-based system of the present invention shown in Fig. 3J1, shown comprising an image formation and detection module having a field of view (FOV), a pair of planar laser illumination arrays for producing first and second planar laser illumination beams, a field of view folding/sweeping mirror for folding and sweeping the field of view of the image formation and detection module, and a pair of planar laser beam folding/sweeping mirrors jointly movable with the FOV folding/sweeping mirror and arranged so as to fold the optical paths of the first and second planar laser illumination beams so that the field of view of the image formation and detection module is in an imaging direction that is coplanar with the planes of first and second planar laser illumination beams during illumination and imaging operations;

Fig. 3J3 is a block schematic diagram of the PLIIM-based system shown in Figs. 3J1 and 3J2, comprising a pair of planar illumination arrays, a linear image formation and detection module, a field of view folding/sweeping mirror, a pair of planar laser illumination beam folding/sweeping mirrors, an image frame grabber, an image data buffer, an image processing computer, and a camera control computer;

Fig. 3J4 is a schematic representation of the linear type image formation and detection (IFD) module employed in the PLIIM-based system shown in Figs. 3J1 and J2, wherein an imaging subsystem having a variable focal length imaging lens, a variable focal distance and a variable field of view is arranged on an optical bench, mounted within a compact module housing, and responsive to zoom and focus control signals generated by the camera control computer of the PLIIM system during illumination and imaging operations;

Fig. 3J5 is a schematic representation of a hand-held bar code symbol reading system embodying the PLIIM-based subsystem of Fig. 3J1;

Fig. 3J6 is a schematic representation of a presentation-type hold-under bar code symbol reading system embodying the PLIIM subsystem of Fig. 3J1;

Fig. 4A is a schematic representation of a seventh generalized embodiment of the PLIIM-based system of the present invention, wherein a pair of planar laser illumination arrays (PLIAs) are mounted on opposite sides of an area (i.e. 2-dimensional) type image formation and detection module (IFDM) having a fixed focal length camera lens, a fixed focal distance and fixed field of view projected through a 3-D scanning region, so that the planar laser illumination arrays produce a plane of laser illumination which is disposed substantially coplanar with sections of the field view of the image formation and detection module while the planar laser illumination beam is automatically scanned across the 3-D scanning region during object illumination and imaging operations carried out on a bar code symbol or other graphical indicia by the PLIIM-based system;

Fig. 4B1 is a schematic representation of the first illustrative embodiment of the PLIIM-based system of the present invention shown in Fig. 4A, shown comprising an area-type image formation and detection module having a field of view (FOV) projected through a 3-D scanning region, a pair of planar laser illumination arrays for producing first and second planar laser illumination beams, and a pair of planar laser beam folding/sweeping mirrors for folding and sweeping the planar laser illumination beams so that the optical paths of these planar laser illumination beams are oriented in an imaging direction that is coplanar with a section of the field of view of the image formation and detection module as the planar laser illumination beams are swept through the 3-D scanning region during object illumination and imaging operations;

Fig. 4B2 is a schematic representation of PLIIM-based system shown in Fig. 4B1, wherein the linear image formation and detection module is shown comprising an area (2-D) array of photo-electronic detectors realized using CCD technology, and each planar laser illumination array is shown comprising an array of planar laser illumination modules (PLIMs);

Fig. 4B3 is a block schematic diagram of the PLIIM-based system shown in Fig. 4B1, comprising a pair of planar illumination arrays, an area-type image formation and detection module, a pair of planar laser illumination beam (PLIB) sweeping mirrors, an image frame grabber, an image data buffer, an image processing computer, and a camera control computer;

Fig. 4C1 is a schematic representation of the second illustrative embodiment of the PLIIM system of the present invention shown in Fig. 4A, comprising a area image-type formation and detection module having a field of view (FOV), a pair of planar laser illumination arrays for producing first and second planar laser illumination beams, a stationary field of view folding mirror for folding and projecting the field of view through a 3-D scanning region, and a pair of planar laser beam folding/sweeping mirrors for folding and sweeping the planar laser illumination beams so that the optical paths of these planar laser illumination beams are oriented in an imaging direction that is coplanar with a section of the field of view of the image formation and detection module as the planar laser illumination beams are swept through the 3-D scanning region during object illumination and imaging operations;

Fig. 4C2 is a block schematic diagram of the PLIIM-based system shown in Fig. 4C1, comprising a pair of planar illumination arrays, an area-type image formation and detection module, a movable field of view folding mirror, a pair of planar laser illumination beam sweeping mirrors jointly or otherwise synchronously movable therewith, an image frame grabber, an image data buffer, an image processing computer, and a camera control computer;

Fig. 4D is a schematic representation of presentation-type holder-under bar code symbol reading system embodying the PLIIM-based subsystem of Fig. 4A;

Fig. 4E is a schematic representation of hand-supportable-type bar code symbol reading system embodying the PLIIM-based subsystem of Fig. 4A;

Fig. 5A is a schematic representation of an eighth generalized embodiment of the PLIIM-based system of the present invention, wherein a pair of planar laser illumination arrays (PLIAs) are mounted on opposite sides of an area (i.e. 2-D) type image formation and detection (IFD) module having a fixed focal length imaging lens, a variable focal distance and a fixed field of view (FOV) projected through a 3-D scanning region, so that the planar laser illumination arrays produce a plane of laser beam illumination which is disposed substantially coplanar with sections of the field view of the image formation and detection module as the planar laser illumination beams are automatically scanned through the 3-D scanning region during object

illumination and image detection operations carried out on a bar code symbol or other graphical indicia by the PLIIM-based system;

Fig. 5B1 is a schematic representation of the first illustrative embodiment of the PLIIM-based system shown in Fig. 5A, shown comprising an image formation and detection module having a field of view (FOV) projected through a 3-D scanning region, a pair of planar laser illumination arrays for producing first and second planar laser illumination beams, and a pair of planar laser beam folding/sweeping mirrors for folding and sweeping the planar laser illumination beams so that the optical paths of these planar laser illumination beams are oriented in an imaging direction that is coplanar with a section of the field of view of the image formation and detection module as the planar laser illumination beams are swept through the 3-D scanning region during object illumination and imaging operations;

Fig. 5B2 is a schematic representation of the first illustrative embodiment of the PLIIM-based system shown in Fig. 5B1, wherein the linear image formation and detection module is shown comprising an area (2-D) array of photo-electronic detectors realized using CCD technology, and each planar laser illumination array is shown comprising an array of planar laser illumination modules;

Fig. 5B3 is a block schematic diagram of the PLIIM-based system shown in Fig. 5B1, comprising a short focal length imaging lens, a low-resolution image detection array and associated image frame grabber, a pair of planar laser illumination arrays, a high-resolution area-type image formation and detection module, a pair of planar laser beam folding/sweeping mirrors, an associated image frame grabber, an image data buffer, an image processing computer, and a camera control computer;

Fig. 5B4 is a schematic representation of the area-type image formation and detection (IFD) module employed in the PLIIM-based system shown in Fig. 5B1, wherein an imaging subsystem having a fixed length imaging lens, a variable focal distance and fixed field of view is arranged on an optical bench, mounted within a compact module housing, and responsive to focus control signals generated by the camera control computer of the PLIIM-based system during illumination and imaging operations;

Fig. 5C1 is a schematic representation of the second illustrative embodiment of the PLIIM-based system of the present invention shown in Fig. 5A, shown comprising an image formation and detection module, a stationary FOV folding mirror for folding and projecting the FOV through a 3-D scanning region, a pair of planar laser illumination arrays, and pair of planar laser beam folding/sweeping mirrors for folding and sweeping the planar laser illumination beams so that the optical paths of these planar laser illumination beams are oriented in an imaging direction that is coplanar with a section of the field of view of the image

formation and detection module as the planar laser illumination beams are swept through the 3-D scanning region during object illumination and imaging operations;

Fig. 5C2 is a schematic representation of the second illustrative embodiment of the PLIIM-based system shown in Fig. 5A, wherein the linear image formation and detection module is shown comprising an area (2-D) array of photo-electronic detectors realized using CCD technology, and each planar laser illumination array is shown comprising an array of planar laser illumination modules (PLIMs);

Fig. 5C3 is a block schematic diagram of the PLIIM-based system shown in Fig. 5C1, comprising a pair of planar laser illumination arrays, an area-type image formation and detection module, a stationary field of view (FOV) folding mirror, a pair of planar laser illumination beam folding and sweeping mirrors, an image frame grabber, an image data buffer, an image processing computer, and a camera control computer;

Fig. 5C4 is a schematic representation of the area-type image formation and detection (IFD) module employed in the PLIIM-based system shown in Fig. 5C1, wherein an imaging subsystem having a fixed length imaging lens, a variable focal distance and fixed field of view is arranged on an optical bench, mounted within a compact module housing, and responsive to focus control signals generated by the camera control computer of the PLIIM-based system during illumination and imaging operations;

Fig. 5D is a schematic representation of a presentation-type hold-under bar code symbol reading system embodying the PLIIM-based subsystem of Fig. 5A;

Fig. 6A is a schematic representation of a ninth generalized embodiment of the PLIIM-based system of the present invention, wherein a pair of planar laser illumination arrays (PLIAs) are mounted on opposite sides of an area type image formation and detection (IFD) module having a variable focal length imaging lens, a variable focal distance and variable field of view projected through a 3-D scanning region, so that the planar laser illumination arrays produce a plane of laser beam illumination which is disposed substantially coplanar with sections of the field view of the image formation and detection module as the planar laser illumination beams are automatically scanned through the 3-D scanning region during object illumination and image detection operations carried out on a bar code symbol or other graphical indicia by the PLIIM-based system;

Fig. 6B1 is a schematic representation of the first illustrative embodiment of the PLIIM-based system of the present invention shown in Fig. 6A, shown comprising an area-type image formation and detection module, a pair of planar laser illumination arrays for producing first and second planar laser illumination beams, a pair of planar laser illumination arrays for producing first and second planar laser illumination beams, and a pair of planar laser beam folding/sweeping mirrors for folding and sweeping the planar laser illumination beams so that

the optical paths of these planar laser illumination beams are oriented in an imaging direction that is coplanar with a section of the field of view of the image formation and detection module as the planar laser illumination beams are swept through the 3-D scanning region during object illumination and imaging operations;

Fig. 6B2 is a schematic representation of a first illustrative embodiment of the PLIIM-based system shown in Fig. 6B1, wherein the area image formation and detection module is shown comprising an area array of photo-electronic detectors realized using CCD technology, and each planar laser illumination array is shown comprising an array of planar laser illumination modules;

Fig. 6B3 is a schematic representation of the first illustrative embodiment of the PLIIM-based system of the present invention shown in Fig. 6B1, shown comprising a pair of planar illumination arrays, an area-type image formation and detection module, a pair of planar laser beam folding/sweeping mirrors, an image frame grabber, an image data buffer, an image processing computer, and a camera control computer;

Fig. 6B4 is a schematic representation of the area-type (2-D) image formation and detection (IFD) module employed in the PLIIM-based system shown in Fig. 6B1, wherein an imaging subsystem having a variable length imaging lens, a variable focal distance and variable field of view is arranged on an optical bench, mounted within a compact module housing, and responsive to zoom and focus control signals generated by the camera control computer of the PLIIM-based system during illumination and imaging operations;

Fig. 6C1 is a schematic representation of the second illustrative embodiment of the PLIIM-based system of the present invention shown in Fig. 6A, shown comprising an area-type image formation and detection module, a stationary FOV folding mirror for folding and projecting the FOV through a 3-D scanning region, a pair of planar laser illumination arrays, and pair of planar laser beam folding/sweeping mirrors for folding and sweeping the planar laser illumination beams so that the optical paths of these planar laser illumination beams are oriented in an imaging direction that is coplanar with a section of the field of view of the image formation and detection module as the planar laser illumination beams are swept through the 3-D scanning region during object illumination and imaging operations;

Fig. 6C2 is a schematic representation of a second illustrative embodiment of the PLIIM-based system shown in Fig. 6C1, wherein the area-type image formation and detection module is shown comprising an area array of photo-electronic detectors realized using CCD technology, and each planar laser illumination array is shown comprising an array of planar laser illumination modules;

Fig. 6C3 is a schematic representation of the second illustrative embodiment of the PLIIM-based system of the present invention shown in Fig. 6C1, shown comprising a pair of

planar laser illumination arrays, an area-type image formation and detection module, a stationary field of view (FOV) folding mirror, a pair of planar laser illumination beam folding and sweeping mirrors, an image frame grabber, an image data buffer, an image processing computer, and a camera control computer;

Fig. 6C4 is a schematic representation of the area-type image formation and detection (IFD) module employed in the PLIIM-based system shown in Fig. 5C1, wherein an imaging subsystem having a variable length imaging lens, a variable focal distance and variable field of view is arranged on an optical bench, mounted within a compact module housing, and responsive to zoom and focus control signals generated by the camera control computer of the PLIIM-based system during illumination and imaging operations;

Fig. 6C5 is a schematic representation of a presentation-type hold-under bar code symbol reading system embodying the PLIIM-based system of Fig. 6A;

Fig. 6D1 is a schematic representation of an exemplary realization of the PLIIM-based system of Fig. 6A, shown comprising an area-type image formation and detection module, a stationary field of view (FOV) folding mirror for folding and projecting the FOV through a 3-D scanning region, a pair of planar laser illumination arrays, and pair of planar laser beam folding/sweeping mirrors for folding and sweeping the planar laser illumination beams so that the optical paths of these planar laser illumination beams are oriented in an imaging direction that is coplanar with a section of the field of view of the image formation and detection module as the planar laser illumination beams are swept through the 3-D scanning region during object illumination and imaging operations;

Fig. 6D2 is a plan view schematic representation of the PLIIM-based system of Fig. 6D1, taken along line 6D2-6D2 in Fig. 6D1, showing the spatial extent of the field of view of the image formation and detection module in the illustrative embodiment of the present invention;

Fig. 6D3 is an elevated end view schematic representation of the PLIIM-based system of Fig. 6D1, taken along line 6D3-6D3 therein, showing the FOV of the area-type image formation and detection module being folded by the stationary FOV folding mirror and projected downwardly through a 3-D scanning region, and the planar laser illumination beams produced from the planar laser illumination arrays being folded and swept so that the optical paths of these planar laser illumination beams are oriented in a direction that is coplanar with a section of the FOV of the image formation and detection module as the planar laser illumination beams are swept through the 3-D scanning region during object illumination and imaging operations;

Fig. 6D4 is an elevated side view schematic representation of the PLIIM-based system of Fig. 6D1, taken along line 6D4-6D4 therein, showing the FOV of the area-type image formation and detection module being folded and projected downwardly through the 3-D scanning

region, while the planar laser illumination beams are swept through the 3-D scanning region during object illumination and imaging operations;

Fig. 6D5 is an elevated side view of the PLIIM-based system of Fig. 6D1, showing the spatial limits of the variable field of view (FOV) provided by the area-type image formation and detection module when imaging the tallest package moving on a conveyor belt structure must be imaged, as well as the spatial limits of the FOV of the image formation and detection module when imaging objects having height values close to the surface height of the conveyor belt structure;

Fig. 6E1 is a schematic representation of a tenth generalized embodiment of the PLIIM-based system of the present invention, wherein a 3-D field of view and a pair of planar laser illumination beams are controllably steered about a 3-D scanning region;

Fig. 6E2 is a schematic representation of the PLIIM-based system shown in Fig. 6E1, shown comprising an area-type (2D) image formation and detection module, a pair of planar laser illumination arrays, a pair of x and y axis field of view (FOV) folding mirrors arranged in relation to the image formation and detection module, and a pair of planar laser illumination beam sweeping mirrors arranged in relation to the pair of planar laser beam illumination mirrors, such that the planes of laser illumination are coplanar with a planar section of the 3-D field of view of the image formation and detection module as the planar laser illumination beams are automatically scanned across a 3-D region of space during object illumination and image detection operations;

Fig. 6E3 is a schematic representation of the PLIIM-based system shown in Fig. 6E1, shown, comprising an area-type image formation and detection module, a pair of planar laser illumination arrays, a pair of x and y axis FOV folding mirrors arranged in relation to the image formation and detection module, and a pair planar laser illumination beam sweeping mirrors arranged in relation to the pair of planar laser beam illumination mirrors, an image frame grabber, an image data buffer, an image processing computer, and a camera control computer;

Fig. 6E4 is a schematic representation showing a portion of the PLIIM-based system in Fig. 6E1, wherein the 3-D field of view of the image formation and detection module is steered over the 3-D scanning region of the system using the x and y axis FOV folding mirrors, working in cooperation with the planar laser illumination beam folding mirrors which sweep the pair of planar laser illumination beams in accordance with the principles of the present invention;

Fig. 7A is a schematic representation of a first illustrative embodiment of the hybrid holographic/CCD PLIIM-based system of the present invention, wherein (i) a pair of planar laser illumination arrays are used to generate a composite planar laser illumination beam for illuminating a target object, (ii) a holographic-type cylindrical lens is used to collimate the rays of the planar laser illumination beam down onto the a conveyor belt surface, and (iii) a motor-

driven holographic imaging disc, supporting a plurality of transmission-type volume holographic optical elements (HOE) having different focal lengths, is disposed before a linear (1-D) CCD image detection array, and functions as a variable-type imaging subsystem capable of detecting images of objects over a large range of object (i.e. working) distances while the planar laser illumination beam illuminates the target object;

Fig. 7B is an elevated side view of the hybrid holographic/CCD PLIIM-based system of Fig. 7A, showing the coplanar relationship between the planar laser illumination beam(s) produced by the planar laser illumination arrays of the PLIIM system, and the variable field of view (FOV) produced by the variable holographic-based focal length imaging subsystem of the PLIIM system;

Fig. 8A is a schematic representation of a second illustrative embodiment of the hybrid holographic/CCD PLIIM-based system of the present invention, wherein (i) a pair of planar laser illumination arrays are used to generate a composite planar laser illumination beam for illuminating a target object, (ii) a holographic-type cylindrical lens is used to collimate the rays of the planar laser illumination beam down onto the a conveyor belt surface, and (iii) a motor-driven holographic imaging disc, supporting a plurality of transmission-type volume holographic optical elements (HOE) having different focal lengths, is disposed before an area (2-D) type CCD image detection array, and functions as a variable-type imaging subsystem capable of detecting images of objects over a large range of object (i.e. working) distances while the planar laser illumination beam illuminates the target object;

Fig. 8B is an elevated side view of the hybrid holographic/CCD-based PLIIM-based system of Fig. 8A, showing the coplanar relationship between the planar laser illumination beam(s) produced by the planar laser illumination arrays of the PLIIM-based system, and the variable field of view (FOV) produced by the variable holographic-based focal length imaging subsystem of the PLIIM-based system;

Fig. 9 is a perspective view of a first illustrative embodiment of the unitary, intelligent, package identification and dimensioning of the present invention, wherein packages, arranged in a singulated or non-singulated configuration, are transported along a high-speed conveyor belt, detected and dimensioned by the LADAR-based imaging, detecting and dimensioning (LDIP) subsystem of the present invention, weighed by an electronic weighing scale, and identified by an automatic PLIIM-based bar code symbol reading system employing a 1-D (i.e. linear) type CCD scanning array, below which a variable focus imaging lens is mounted for imaging bar coded packages transported therebeneath in a fully automated manner;

Fig. 10 is a schematic block diagram illustrating the system architecture and subsystem components of the unitary package identification and dimensioning system of Fig. 9, shown comprising a LADAR-based package imaging, detecting and dimensioning (LDIP) subsystem

(i.e. including its integrated package velocity computation subsystem, package height/width/length profiling subsystem, the package-in-tunnel indication subsystem, a package-out-of-tunnel indication subsystem), a PLIIM-based (linear CCD) bar code symbol reading subsystem, data-element queuing, handling and processing subsystem, the input/output port multiplexing subsystem, an I/O port for a graphical user interface (GUI), network interface controller (for supporting networking protocols such as Ethernet, IP, etc.), all of which are integrated together as a fully working unit contained within a single housing of ultra-compact construction;

Fig. 11 is a schematic representation of a portion of the unitary PLIIM-based package identification and dimensioning system of Fig. 9, showing in greater detail the interface between its PLIIM-based subsystem and LDIP subsystem, and the various information signals which are generated by the LDIP subsystem and provided to the camera control computer, and how the camera control computer generates digital camera control signals which are provided to the image formation and detection (i.e. camera) subsystem so that the unitary system can carry out its diverse functions in an integrated manner, including (1) capturing digital images having (i) square pixels (i.e. 1:1 aspect ratio) independent of package height or velocity, (ii) significantly reduced speckle-noise pattern levels, and (iii) constant image resolution measured in dots per inch (dpi) independent of package height or velocity and without the use of costly telecentric optics employed by prior art systems, (2) automatic cropping of captured images so that only regions of interest reflecting the package or package label are either transmitted to or processed by the image processing computer (using 1-D or 2-D bar code symbol decoding or optical character recognition (OCR) image processing algorithms), and (3) automatic image-lifting operations for supporting other package management operations carried out by the end-user;

Fig. 12A is a perspective view of the housing for the unitary package dimensioning and identification system of Fig. 9, showing the construction of its housing and the spatial arrangement of its two optically-isolated compartments, with all internal parts removed therefrom for purposes of illustration;

Fig. 12B is a first cross-sectional view of the unitary PLIIM-based package dimensioning and identification system of Fig. 9, showing the PLIIM-based subsystem and subsystem components contained within a first optically-isolated compartment formed in the upper deck of the unitary system housing, and the LDIP subsystem contained within a second optically-isolated compartment formed in the lower deck, below the first optically-isolated compartment;

Fig. 12C is a second cross-sectional view of the unitary package dimensioning and identification system of Fig. 9, showing the spatial layout of the various optical and electro-

optical components mounted on the optical bench of the PLIIM-based subsystem installed within the first optically-isolated cavity of the system housing;

Fig. 12D is a third cross-sectional view of the unitary PLIIM-based package dimensioning and identification system of Fig. 9, showing the spatial layout of the various optical and electro-optical components mounted on the optical bench of the LDIP subsystem installed within the second optically-isolated cavity of the system housing;

Fig. 12E is a schematic representation of an illustrative implementation of the image formation and detection subsystem contained in the image formation and detection (IFD) module employed in the PLIIM-based system of Fig. 9, shown comprising a stationary lens system mounted before the stationary linear (CCD-type) image detection array, a first movable lens system for stepped movement relative to the stationary lens system during image zooming operations, and a second movable lens system for stepped movements relative to the first movable lens system and the stationary lens system during image focusing operations;

Fig. 13A is a first perspective view of an alternative housing design for use with the unitary PLIIM-based package identification and dimensioning subsystem of the present invention, wherein the housing has the same light transmission apertures provided in the housing design shown in Figs. 12A and 12B, but has no housing panels disposed about the light transmission apertures through which PLIBs and the FOV of the PLIIM-based subsystem extend, thereby providing a region of space into which an optional device can be mounted for carrying out a speckle-pattern noise reduction solution in accordance with the principles of the present invention;

Fig. 13B is a second perspective view of the housing design shown in Fig. 13A;

Fig. 13C is a third perspective view of the housing design shown in Fig. 13A, showing the different sets of optically-isolated light transmission apertures formed in the underside surface of the housing;

Fig. 14 is a schematic representation of the unitary PLIIM-based package dimensioning and identification system of Fig. 13, showing the use of a "Real-Time" Package Height Profiling And Edge Detection Processing Module within the LDIP subsystem to automatically process raw data received by the LDIP subsystem and generate, as output, time-stamped data sets that are transmitted to a camera control computer which automatically processes the received time-stamped data sets and generates real-time camera control signals that drive the focus and zoom lens group translators within a high-speed auto-focus/auto-zoom digital camera subsystem so that the camera subsystem automatically captures digital images having (1) square pixels (i.e. 1:1 aspect ratio) independent of package height or velocity, (2) significantly reduced speckle-noise levels, and (3) constant image resolution measured in dots per inch (dpi) independent of package height or velocity;

Fig. 15 is a flow chart describing the primary data processing operations that are carried out by the Real-Time Package Height Profile And Edge Detection Processing Module within the LDIP subsystem employed in the PLIIM-based system shown in Figs. 13 and 14, wherein each sampled row of raw range data collected by the LDIP subsystem is processed to produce a data set (i.e. containing data elements representative of the current time-stamp, the package height, the position of the left and right edges of the package edges, the coordinate subrange where height values exhibit maximum range intensity variation and the current package velocity) which is then transmitted to the camera control computer for processing and generation of real-time camera control signals that are transmitted to the auto-focus/auto-zoom digital camera subsystem;

Fig. 16 is a flow chart describing the primary data processing operations that are carried out by the Real-Time Package Edge Detection Processing Method performed by the Real-Time Package Height Profiling And Edge Detection Processing Module within the LDIP subsystem of PLIIM-based system shown in Figs. 13 and 14;

Fig. 17 is a schematic representation of the LDIP Subsystem embodied in the unitary PLIIM-based subsystem of Figs. 13 and 14, shown mounted above a conveyor belt structure;

Fig. 17A is a data structure used in the Real-Time Package Height Profiling Method of Fig. 15 to buffer sampled range intensity (I_i) and phase angle (ϕ_i) data samples collected at various scan angles (α_I) by LDIP Subsystem during each LDIP scan cycle and before application of coordinate transformations;

Fig. 17B is a data structure used in the Real-Time Package Edge Detection Method of Fig. 16, to buffer range (R_i) and polar angle ($\O_i$) dated samples collected at each scan angle (α_I) by the LDIP Subsystem during each LDIP scan cycle, and before application of coordinate transformations;

Fig. 17C is a data structure used in the method of Fig. 15 to buffer package height (y_i) and position (x_i) data samples computed at each scan angle (α_I) by the LDIP subsystem during each LDIP scan cycle, and after application of coordinate transformations;

Figs. 18A and 18B, taken together, set forth a real-time camera control process that is carried out within the camera control computer employed within the PLIIM-based systems of Fig. 11, wherein the camera control computer automatically processes the received time-stamped data sets and generates real-time camera control signals that drive the focus and zoom lens group translators within a high-speed auto-focus/auto-zoom digital camera subsystem (i.e. the IFD module) so that the camera subsystem automatically captures digital images having (1) square pixels (i.e. 1:1 aspect ratio) independent of package height or velocity, (2) significantly

reduced speckle-noise levels, and (3) constant image resolution measured in dots per inch (DPI) independent of package height or velocity;

Figs. 18C1 and 18C2, taken together, set forth a flow chart setting forth the steps of a method of computing the optical power which must be produced from each VLD in a PLIIM-based system, based on the computed speed of the conveyor belt above which the PLIIM-based is mounted, so that the control process carried out by the camera control computer in the PLIIM-based system captures digital images having a substantially uniform "white" level, regardless of conveyor belt speed, thereby simplifying image processing operations;

Fig. 19 is a schematic representation of the Package Data Buffer structure employed by the Real-Time Package Height Profiling And Edge Detection Processing Module illustrated in Fig. 14, wherein each current raw data set received by the Real-Time Package Height Profiling And Edge Detection Processing Module is buffered in a row of the Package Data Buffer, and each data element in the raw data set is assigned a fixed column index and variable row index which increments as the raw data set is shifted one index unit as each new incoming raw data set is received into the Package Data Buffer;

Fig. 20. is a schematic representation of the Camera Pixel Data Buffer structure employed by the Auto-Focus/Auto-Zoom digital camera subsystem shown in Fig. 14, wherein each pixel element in each captured image frame is stored in a storage cell of the Camera Pixel Data Buffer, which is assigned a unique set of pixel indices (i,j);

Fig. 21 is a schematic representation of an exemplary Zoom and Focus Lens Group Position Look-Up Table associated with the Auto-Focus/Auto-Zoom digital camera subsystem used by the camera control computer of the illustrative embodiment, wherein for a given package height detected by the Real-Time Package Height Profiling And Edge Detection Processing Module, the camera control computer uses the Look-Up Table to determine the precise positions to which the focus and zoom lens groups must be moved by generating and supplying real-time camera control signals to the focus and zoom lens group translators within a high-speed auto-focus/auto-zoom digital camera subsystem (i.e. the IFD module) so that the camera subsystem automatically captures focused digital images having (1) square pixels (i.e. 1:1 aspect ratio) independent of package height or velocity, (2) significantly reduced speckle-noise levels, and (3) constant image resolution measured in dots per inch (DPI) independent of package height or velocity;

Fig. 22 is a graphical representation of the focus and zoom lens movement characteristics associated with the zoom and lens groups employed in the illustrative embodiment of the Auto-focus/auto-zoom digital camera subsystem, wherein for a given detected package height, the position of the focus and zoom lens group relative to the camera's working distance is obtained

by finding the points along these characteristics at the specified working distance (i.e. detected package height);

Fig. 23 is a schematic representation of an exemplary Photo-integration Time Period Look-Up Table associated with CCD image detection array employed in the auto-focus/auto-zoom digital camera subsystem of the PLIIM-based system, wherein for a given detected package height and package velocity, the camera control computer uses the Look-Up Table to determine the precise photo-integration time period for the CCD image detection elements employed within the auto-focus/auto-zoom digital camera subsystem (i.e. the IFD module) so that the camera subsystem automatically captures focused digital images having (1) square pixels (i.e. 1:1 aspect ratio) independent of package height or velocity, (2) significantly reduced speckle-noise levels, and (3) constant image resolution measured in dots per inch (DPI) independent of package height or velocity;

Fig. 24 is a perspective view of a unitary, intelligent, package identification and dimensioning system constructed in accordance with the second illustrated embodiment of the present invention, wherein packages, arranged in a non-singulated or singulated configuration, are transported along a high speed conveyor belt, detected and dimensioned by the LADAR-based imaging, detecting and dimensioning (LDIP) subsystem of the present invention, weighed by a weighing scale, and identified by an automatic PLIIM-based bar code symbol reading system employing a 2-D (i.e. area) type CCD-based scanning array below which a light focusing lens is mounted for imaging bar coded packages transported therebeneath and decode processing these images to read such bar code symbols in a fully automated manner;

Fig. 25 is a schematic block diagram illustrating the system architecture and subsystem components of the unitary package identification and dimensioning system shown in Fig. 24, namely its LADAR-based package imaging, detecting and dimensioning (LDIP) subsystem (with its integrated package velocity computation subsystem, package height/width/length profiling subsystem, the package-in-tunnel indication subsystem, the package-out-of-tunnel indication subsystem), the PLIIM-based (linear CCD) bar code symbol reading subsystem, the data-element queuing, handling and processing subsystem, the input/output port multiplexing subsystem, an I/O port for a graphical user interface (GUI), and network interface controller (for supporting networking protocols such as Ethernet, IP, etc.), all of which are integrated together as a working unit contained within a single housing of ultra-compact construction;

Fig. 26 is a schematic representation of a portion of the unitary package identification and dimensioning system of Fig. 24 showing in greater detail the interface between its PLIIM-based subsystem and LDIP subsystem, and the various information signals which are generated by the LDIP subsystem and provided to the camera control computer, and how the camera control computer generates digital camera control signals which are provided to the image

formation and detection (IFD) subsystem (i.e. "camera") so that the unitary system can carry out its diverse functions in an integrated manner, including (1) capturing digital images having (i) square pixels (i.e. 1:1 aspect ratio) independent of package height or velocity, (ii) significantly reduced speckle-noise pattern levels, and (iii) constant image resolution measured in dots per inch (DPI) independent of package height or velocity and without the use of costly telecentric optics employed by prior art systems, (2) automatic cropping of captured images so that only regions of interest reflecting the package or package label are transmitted to the image processing computer (for 1-D or 2-D bar code symbol decoding or optical character recognition (OCR) image processing), and (3) automatic image-lifting operations for supporting other package management operations carried out by the end-user;

Fig. 27 is a schematic representation of the four-sided tunnel-type package identification and dimensioning (PID) system constructed by arranging about a high-speed package conveyor belt subsystem, one PLIIM-based PID unit (as shown in Fig. 9) and three modified PLIIM-based PID units (without the LDIP Subsystem), wherein the LDIP subsystem in the top PID unit is configured as the master unit to detect and dimension packages transported along the belt, while the bottom PID unit is configured as a slave unit to view packages through a small gap between conveyor belt sections and the side PID units are configured as slave units to view packages from side angles slightly downstream from the master unit, and wherein all of the PID units are operably connected to an Ethernet control hub (e.g. contained within one of the slave units) of a local area network (LAN) providing high-speed data packet communication among each of the units within the tunnel system;

Fig. 28 is a schematic system diagram of the tunnel-type system shown in Fig. 27, embedded within a first-type LAN having an Ethernet control hub (e.g. contained within one of the slave units);

Fig. 29 is a schematic system diagram of the tunnel-type system shown in Fig. 27, embedded within a second-type LAN having an Ethernet control hub and an Ethernet data switch (e.g. contained within one of the slave units), and a fiber-optic (FO) based network, to which a keying-type computer workstation is connected at a remote distance within a package counting facility;

Fig. 30 is a schematic representation of the camera-based package identification and dimensioning subsystem of Fig. 27, illustrating the system architecture of the slave units in relation to the master unit, and that (1) the package height, width, and length coordinates data and velocity data elements (computed by the LDIP subsystem within the master unit) are produced by the master unit and defined with respect to the global coordinate reference system, and (2) these package dimension data elements are transmitted to each slave unit on the data communication network, converted into the package height, width, and length coordinates,

and used to generate real-time camera control signals which intelligently drive the camera subsystem within each slave unit, and (3) the package identification data elements generated by any one of the slave units are automatically transmitted to the master slave unit for time-stamping, queuing, and processing to ensure accurate package dimension and identification data element linking operations in accordance with the principles of the present invention;

Fig. 31 is a schematic representation of the tunnel-type system of Fig. 27, illustrating that package dimension data (i.e. height, width, and length coordinates) is (i) centrally computed by the master unit and referenced to a global coordinate reference frame, (ii) transmitted over the data network to each slave unit within the system, and (iii) converted to the local coordinate reference frame of each slave unit for use by its camera control computer to drive its automatic zoom and focus imaging optics in an intelligent, real-time manner in accordance with the principles of the present invention;

Fig. 31A is a schematic representation of one of the slave units in the tunnel system of Fig. 31, showing the angle measurement (i.e. protractor) devices of the present invention integrated into the housing and support structure of each slave unit, thereby enabling technicians to measure the pitch and yaw angle of the local coordinate system symbolically embedded within each slave unit;

Figs. 32A and 32B, taken together, provide a high-level flow chart describing the primary steps involved in carrying out the novel method of controlling local vision-based camera subsystems deployed within a tunnel-based system, using real-time package dimension data centrally computed with respect to a global/central coordinate frame of reference, and distributed to local package identification units over a high-speed data communication network;

Fig. 33A is a schematic representation of a first illustrative embodiment of the bioptical PLIIM-based product dimensioning, analysis and identification system of the present invention, comprising a pair of PLIIM-based package identification and dimensioning subsystems, wherein each PLIIM-based subsystem employs visible laser diodes (VLDs) having different color producing wavelengths to produce a multi-spectral planar laser illumination beam (PLIB), and a 1-D (linear-type) CCD image detection array within the compact system housing to capture images of objects (e.g. produce) that are processed in order to determine the shape/geometry, dimensions and color of such products in diverse retail shopping environments;

Fig. 33B is a schematic representation of the bioptical PLIIM-based product dimensioning, analysis and identification system of Fig. 33A, showing its PLIIM-based subsystems and 2-D scanning volume in greater detail;

Fig. 33C is a system block diagram illustrating the system architecture of the bioptical PLIIM-based product dimensioning, analysis and identification system of the first illustrative embodiment shown in Figs. 33A and 33B;

Fig. 34A is a schematic representation of a second illustrative embodiment of the bioptical PLIIM-based product dimensioning, analysis and identification system of the present invention, comprising a pair of PLIIM-based package identification and dimensioning subsystems, wherein each PLIIM-based subsystem employs visible laser diodes (VLDs) having different color producing wavelengths to produce a multi-spectral planar laser illumination beam (PLIB), and a 2-D (area-type) CCD image detection array within the compact system housing to capture images of objects (e.g. produce) that are processed in order to determine the shape/geometry, dimensions and color of such products in diverse retail shopping environments;

Fig. 34B is a schematic representation of the bioptical PLIIM-based product dimensioning, analysis and identification system of Fig. 34A, showing its PLIIM-based subsystems and 3-D scanning volume in greater detail;

Fig. 34C is a system block diagram illustrating the system architecture of the bioptical PLIIM-based product dimensioning, analysis and identification system of the second illustrative embodiment shown in Figs. 34A and 34B;

Fig. 35A is a first perspective view of the planar laser illumination module (PLIM) realized on a semiconductor chip, wherein a micro-sized (diffractive or refractive) cylindrical lens array is mounted upon a linear array of surface emitting lasers (SELs) fabricated on a semiconductor substrate, and encased within an integrated circuit (IC) package, so as to produce a planar laser illumination beam (PLIB) composed of numerous (e.g. 100-400) spatially incoherent laser beam components emitted from said linear array of SELs in accordance with the principles of the present invention;

Fig. 35B is a second perspective view of an illustrative embodiment of the PLIM semiconductor chip of Fig. 35A, showing its semiconductor package provided with electrical connector pins and an elongated light transmission window, through which a planar laser illumination beam is generated and transmitted in accordance with the principles of the present invention;

Fig. 36A is a cross-sectional schematic representation of the PLIM-based semiconductor chip of the present invention, constructed from "45 degree mirror" surface emitting lasers (SELs);

Fig. 36B is a cross-sectional schematic representation of the PLIM-based semiconductor chip of the present invention, constructed from "grating-coupled" SELs;

Fig. 36C is a cross-sectional schematic representation of the PLIM-based semiconductor chip of the present invention, constructed from "vertical cavity" SELs, or VCSELs;

Fig. 37 is a schematic perspective view of a planar laser illumination and imaging module (PLIIM) of the present invention realized on a semiconductor chip, wherein a pair of micro-sized (diffractive or refractive) cylindrical lens arrays are mounted upon a pair of linear arrays of surface emitting lasers (SELs) (of corresponding length characteristics) fabricated on opposite sides of a linear CCD image detection array, and wherein both the linear CCD image detection array and linear SEL arrays are formed a common semiconductor substrate, encased within an integrated circuit (IC) package, and collectively produce a composite planar laser illumination beam (PLIB) that is transmitted through a pair of light transmission windows formed in the IC package and aligned substantially within the planar field of view (FOV) provided by the linear CCD image detection array in accordance with the principles of the present invention;

Fig. 38A is a schematic representation of a CCD/VLD PLIIM-based semiconductor chip of the present invention, wherein a plurality of electronically-activatable linear SEL arrays are used to electro-optically scan (i.e. illuminate) the entire 3-D FOV of CCD image detection array contained within the same integrated circuit package, without using mechanical scanning mechanisms;

Fig. 38B is a schematic representation of the CCD/VLD PLIIM-based semiconductor chip of Fig. 38A, showing a 2D array of surface emitting lasers (SELs) formed about an area-type CCD image detection array on a common semiconductor substrate, with a field of view (FOV) defining lens element mounted over the 2D CCD image detection array and a 2D array of cylindrical lens elements mounted over the 2D array of SELs;

Fig. 39A is a perspective view of a first illustrative embodiment of the PLIIM-based hand-supportable linear imager of the present invention which contains within its housing, (1) a PLIIM-based image capture and processing engine comprising a dual-VLD PLIA and a 1-D (i.e. linear) image detection array with vertically-elongated image detection elements and configured within an optical assembly that operates in accordance with the first generalized method of speckle-pattern noise reduction illustrated in Figs. 1I1A through 1I3D, (2) a LCD display panel for displaying images captured by said engine and information provided by a host computer system or other information supplying device, and (3) a manual data entry keypad for manually entering data into the imager during diverse types of information-related transactions supported by the PLIIM-based hand-supportable imager;

Fig. 39B is an exploded perspective view of the PLIIM-based image capture and processing engine employed in the hand-supportable linear imager of Fig. 39A, showing its PLIAs, IFD module (i.e. camera subsystem) and associated optical components mounted on an

optical-bench/multi-layer PC board, for containment between the upper and lower portions of the engine housing;

Fig. 39C is a plan view of the optical-bench/multi-layer PC board contained within the PLIIM-based image capture and processing engine of Fig. 39B, showing the field of view of the IFD module in a spatially-overlapping coplanar relation with respect to the PLIBs generated by the PLIAs employed therein;

Fig. 39D is an elevated front view of the PLIIM-based image capture and processing engine of Fig. 39B, showing the PLIAs mounted on opposite sides of its IFD module;

Fig. 39E is an elevated side view of the PLIIM-based image capture and processing engine of Fig. 39B, showing the field of view of its IFD module spatially-overlapping and coextensive (i.e. coplanar) with the PLIBs generated by the PLIAs employed therein;

Fig. 40A1 is a block schematic diagram of a manually-activated version of the PLIIM-based hand-supportable linear imager of Fig. 39A, shown configured with (i) a linear-type image formation and detection (IFD) module having a linear image detection array with vertically-elongated image detection elements and fixed focal length/fixed focal distance image formation optics, (ii) a manually-actuated trigger switch for manually activating the planar laser illumination array (driven by a set of VLD driver circuits), the linear-type image formation and detection (IFD) module, the image frame grabber, the image data buffer, and the image processing computer, via the camera control computer, in response to the manual activation of the trigger switch, and capturing images of objects (i.e. bearing bar code symbols and other graphical indicia) through the fixed focal length/fixed focal distance image formation optics, and (iii) a LCD display panel and a data entry keypad for supporting diverse types of transactions using the PLIIM-based hand-supportable imager;

Fig. 40A2 is a block schematic diagram of an automatically-activated version of the PLIIM-based hand-supportable linear imager of Fig. 39A, shown configured with (i) a linear-type image formation and detection (IFD) module having a linear image detection array with vertically-elongated image detection elements and fixed focal length/fixed focal distance image formation optics, (ii) an IR-based object detection subsystem within its hand-supportable housing for automatically activating in response to the detection of an object in its IR-based object detection field, the planar laser illumination arrays (driven by a set of VLD driver circuits), the linear-type image formation and detection (IFD) module, as well as the image frame grabber, the image data buffer, and the image processing computer, via the camera control computer, (ii) a manually-activatable switch for enabling transmission of symbol character data to a host computer system in response to the decoding a bar code symbol within a captured image frame, and (iii) a LCD display panel and a data entry keypad for supporting diverse types of transactions using the PLIIM-based hand-supportable imager;

Fig. 40A3 is a block schematic diagram of an automatically-activated version of the PLIIM-based hand-supportable linear imager of Fig. 39A, shown configured with (i) a linear-type image formation and detection (IFD) module having a linear image detection array with vertically-elongated image detection elements and fixed focal length/fixed focal distance image formation optics, (ii) a laser-based object detection subsystem within its hand-supportable housing for automatically activating the planar laser illumination arrays into a full-power mode of operation, the linear-type image formation and detection (IFD) module, the image frame grabber, the image data buffer, and the image processing computer, via the camera control computer, in response to the automatic detection of an object in its laser-based object detection field, (iii) a manually-activatable switch for enabling transmission of symbol character data to a host computer system upon decoding a bar code symbol within a captured image frame, and (iv) a LCD display panel and a data entry keypad for supporting diverse types of transactions using the PLIIM-based hand-supportable imager;

Fig. 40A4 is a block schematic diagram of an automatically-activated version of the PLIIM-based hand-supportable linear imager of Fig. 39A, shown configured with (i) a linear-type image formation and detection (IFD) module having a linear image detection array with vertically-elongated image detection elements and fixed focal length/fixed focal distance image formation optics, (ii) an ambient-light driven object detection subsystem within its hand-supportable housing for automatically activating the planar laser illumination arrays (driven by a set of VLD driver circuits), the linear-type image formation and detection (IFD) module, the image frame grabber, the image data buffer, and the image processing computer, via the camera control computer, in response to the automatic detection of an object via ambient-light detected by object detection field enabled by the CCD image sensor within the IFD module, (iii) a manually-activatable switch for enabling transmission of symbol character data to a host computer system upon decoding a bar code symbol within a captured image frame, and (iv) a LCD display panel and a data entry keypad for supporting diverse types of transactions using the PLIIM-based hand-supportable imager;

Fig. 40A5 is a block schematic diagram of an automatically-activated version of the PLIIM-based hand-supportable linear imager of Fig. 39A, shown configured with (i) a linear-type image formation and detection (IFD) module having a linear image detection array with vertically-elongated image detection elements and fixed focal length/fixed focal distance image formation optics, (ii) an automatic bar code symbol detection subsystem within its hand-supportable housing for automatically activating the image processing computer for decode-processing in response to the automatic detection of an bar code symbol within its bar code symbol detection field enabled by the CCD image sensor within the IFD module, (iii) a manually-activatable switch for enabling transmission of symbol character data to a host

computer system upon decoding a bar code symbol within a captured image frame, and (iv) a LCD display panel and a data entry keypad for supporting diverse types of transactions using the PLIIM-based hand-supportable imager;

Fig. 40B1 is a block schematic diagram of a manually-activated version of the PLIIM-based hand-supportable linear imager of Fig. 39A, shown configured with (i) a linear-type image formation and detection (IFD) module having a linear image detection array with vertically-elongated image detection elements and fixed focal length/variable focal distance image formation optics, (ii) a manually-actuated trigger switch for manually activating the planar laser illumination array (driven by a set of VLD driver circuits), the linear-type image formation and detection (IFD) module, the image frame grabber, the image data buffer, and the image processing computer, via the camera control computer, in response to the manual activation of the trigger switch, and capturing images of objects (i.e. bearing bar code symbols and other graphical indicia) through the fixed focal length/fixed focal distance image formation optics, and (iii) a LCD display panel and a data entry keypad for supporting diverse types of transactions using the PLIIM-based hand-supportable imager;

Fig. 40B2 is a block schematic diagram of an automatically-activated version of the PLIIM-based hand-supportable linear imager of Fig. 39A, shown configured with (i) a linear-type image formation and detection (IFD) module having a linear image detection array with vertically-elongated image detection elements and fixed focal length/variable focal distance image formation optics, (ii) an IR-based object detection subsystem within its hand-supportable housing for automatically activating in response to the detection of an object in its IR-based object detection field, the planar laser illumination array (driven by a set of VLD driver circuits), the linear-type image formation and detection (IFD) module, as well as the image frame grabber, the image data buffer, and the image processing computer, via the camera control computer, (iii) a manually-activatable switch for enabling transmission of symbol character data to a host computer system in response decoding a bar code symbol within a captured image frame, and (iv) a LCD display panel and a data entry keypad for supporting diverse types of transactions using the PLIIM-based hand-supportable imager;

Fig. 40B3 is a block schematic diagram of an automatically-activated version of the PLIIM-based hand-supportable linear imager of Fig. 39A, shown configured with (i) a linear-type image formation and detection (IFD) module having a linear image detection array with vertically-elongated image detection elements and fixed focal length/variable focal distance image formation optics, (ii) a laser-based object detection subsystem within its hand-supportable housing for automatically activating the planar laser illumination array into a full-power mode of operation, the linear-type image formation and detection (IFD) module, the image frame grabber, the image data buffer, and the image processing computer, via the camera

control computer, in response to the automatic detection of an object in its laser-based object detection field, (iii) a manually-activatable switch for enabling transmission of symbol character data to a host computer system in response to decoding a bar code symbol within a captured image frame, and (iv) a LCD display panel and a data entry keypad for supporting diverse types of transactions using the PLIIM-based hand-supportable imager;

Fig. 40B4 is a block schematic diagram of an automatically-activated version of the PLIIM-based hand-supportable linear imager of Fig. 39A, shown configured with (i) a linear-type image formation and detection (IFD) module having a linear image detection array with vertically-elongated image detection elements and fixed focal length/variable focal distance image formation optics, (ii) an ambient-light driven object detection subsystem within its hand-supportable housing for automatically activating the planar laser illumination array (driven by a set of VLD driver circuits), the linear-type image formation and detection (IFD) module, the image frame grabber, the image data buffer, and the image processing computer, via the camera control computer, in response to the automatic detection of an object via ambient-light detected by object detection field enabled by the CCD image sensor within the IFD module, and (iii) a manually-activatable switch for enabling transmission of symbol character data to a host computer system in response to decoding a bar code symbol within a captured image frame;

Fig. 40B5 is a block schematic diagram of an automatically-activated version of the PLIIM-based hand-supportable linear imager of Fig. 39A, shown configured with (i) a linear-type image formation and detection (IFD) module having a linear image detection array with vertically-elongated image detection elements and fixed focal length/variable focal distance image formation optics, (ii) an automatic bar code symbol detection subsystem within its hand-supportable housing for automatically activating the image processing computer for decode-processing in response to the automatic detection of an bar code symbol within its bar code symbol detection field enabled by the CCD image sensor within the IFD module, (iii) a manually-activatable switch for enabling transmission of symbol character data to a host computer system in response to the decoding a bar code symbol within a captured image frame, and (iv) a LCD display panel and a data entry keypad for supporting diverse types of transactions using the PLIIM-based hand-supportable imager;

Fig. 40C1 is a block schematic diagram of a manually-activated version of the PLIIM-based hand-supportable linear imager of Fig. 39A, shown configured with (i) a linear-type image formation and detection (IFD) module having a linear image detection array with vertically-elongated image detection elements and variable focal length/variable focal distance image formation optics, (ii) a manually-actuated trigger switch for manually activating the planar laser illumination array (driven by a set of VLD driver circuits), the linear-type image formation and detection (IFD) module, the image frame grabber, the image data buffer, and the

image processing computer, via the camera control computer, in response to the manual activation of the trigger switch, and capturing images of objects (i.e. bearing bar code symbols and other graphical indicia) through the fixed focal length/fixed focal distance image formation optics, and (iii) a LCD display panel and a data entry keypad for supporting diverse types of transactions using the PLIIM-based hand-supportable imager;

Fig. 40C2 is a block schematic diagram of an automatically-activated version of the PLIIM-based hand-supportable linear imager of Fig. 39A, shown configured with (i) a linear-type image formation and detection (IFD) module having a linear image detection array with vertically-elongated image detection elements and variable focal length/variable focal distance image formation optics, (ii) an IR-based object detection subsystem within its hand-supportable housing for automatically activating upon detection of an object in its IR-based object detection field, the planar laser illumination array (driven by a set of VLD driver circuits), the linear-type image formation and detection (IFD) module, as well as the image frame grabber, the image data buffer, and the image processing computer, via the camera control computer, (ii) a manually-activatable switch for enabling transmission of symbol character data to a host computer system in response to decoding a bar code symbol within a captured image frame, and (iii) a LCD display panel and a data entry keypad for supporting diverse types of transactions using the PLIIM-based hand-supportable imager;

Fig. 40C3 is a block schematic diagram of an automatically-activated version of the PLIIM-based hand-supportable linear imager of Fig. 39A, shown configured with (i) a linear-type image formation and detection (IFD) module having a linear image detection array with vertically-elongated image detection elements and variable focal length/variable focal distance image formation optics, (ii) a laser-based object detection subsystem within its hand-supportable housing for automatically activating the planar laser illumination array into a full-power mode of operation, the linear-type image formation and detection (IFD) module, the image frame grabber, the image data buffer, and the image processing computer, via the camera control computer, in response to the automatic detection of an object in its laser-based object detection field, (iii) a manually-activatable switch for enabling transmission of symbol character data to a host computer system upon decoding a bar code symbol within a captured image frame, and (iv) a LCD display panel and a data entry keypad for supporting diverse types of transactions using the PLIIM-based hand-supportable imager;

Fig. 40C4 is a block schematic diagram of an automatically-activated version of the PLIIM-based hand-supportable linear imager of Fig. 39A, shown configured with (i) a linear-type image formation and detection (IFD) module having a linear image detection array with vertically-elongated image detection elements and variable focal length/variable focal distance image formation optics, (ii) an ambient-light driven object detection subsystem within its hand-

supportable housing for automatically activating the planar laser illumination array (driven by a set of VLD driver circuits), the linear-type image formation and detection (IFD) module, the image frame grabber, the image data buffer, and the image processing computer, via the camera control computer, in response to the automatic detection of an object via ambient-light detected by object detection field enabled by the CCD image sensor within the IFD module, (iii) a manually-activatable switch for enabling transmission of symbol character data to a host computer system in response to the decoding a bar code symbol within a captured image frame, and (iv) a LCD display panel and a data entry keypad for supporting diverse types of transactions using the PLIIM-based hand-supportable imager;

Fig. 40C5 is a block schematic diagram of an automatically-activated version of the PLIIM-based hand-supportable linear imager of Fig. 39A, shown configured with (i) a linear-type image formation and detection (IFD) module having a linear image detection array with vertically-elongated image detection elements and variable focal length/variable focal distance image formation optics, (ii) an automatic bar code symbol detection subsystem within its hand-supportable housing for automatically activating the image processing computer for decode-processing in response to the automatic detection of an bar code symbol within its bar code symbol detection field enabled by the CCD image sensor within the IFD module, (iii) a manually-activatable switch for enabling transmission of symbol character data to a host computer system in response to decoding a bar code symbol within a captured image frame, and (iv) a LCD display panel and a data entry keypad for supporting diverse types of transactions using the PLIIM-based hand-supportable imager;

Fig. 41A is a perspective view of a second illustrative embodiment of the PLIIM-based hand-supportable linear imager of the present invention which contains within its housing, (1) a PLIIM-based image capture and processing engine comprising a dual-VLD PLIA and a linear CCD image detection array with vertically-elongated image detection elements configured within an optical assembly which employs an acousto-optical Bragg-cell panel and a cylindrical lens array to provide a despeckling mechanism which operates in accordance with the first generalized method of speckle-pattern noise reduction illustrated in Figs. 1I6A and 1I6B;

Fig. 41B is an exploded perspective view of the PLIIM-based image capture and processing engine employed in the hand-supportable imager of Fig. 41A, showing its PLIAs, IFD (i.e. camera subsystem) and associated optical components mounted on an optical-bench/multi-layer PC board, for containment between the upper and lower portions of the engine housing;

Fig. 41C is a plan view of the optical-bench/multi-layer PC board contained within the PLIIM-based image capture and processing engine of Fig. 41B, showing the field of view of the

IFD module in a spatially-overlapping relation with respect to the PLIBs generated by the PLIAs employed therein;

Fig. 41D is an elevated front view of the PLIIM-based image capture and processing engine of Fig. 41B, showing the PLIAs mounted on opposite sides of its IFD module;

Fig. 42A is a perspective view of a third illustrative embodiment of the PLIIM-based hand-supportable linear imager of the present invention which contains within its housing, (1) a PLIIM-based image capture and processing engine comprising a dual-VLD PLIA and a linear CCD image detection array having vertically-elongated image detection elements configured within an optical assembly which provides a despeckling mechanism that operates in accordance with the first generalized method of speckle-pattern noise reduction illustrated in Figs. 1I15A and 1I15D, (2) a LCD display panel for displaying images captured by said engine and information provided by a host computer system or other information supplying device, and (3) a manual data entry keypad for manually entering data into the imager during diverse types of information-related transactions supported by the PLIIM-based hand-supportable imager;

Fig. 42B is an exploded perspective view of the PLIIM-based image capture and processing engine employed in the hand-supportable imager of Fig. 42A, showing its PLIAs, IFD (i.e. camera) subsystem and associated optical components mounted on an optical-bench/multi-layer PC board, for containment between the upper and lower portions of the engine housing;

Fig. 42C is a plan view of the optical-bench/multi-layer PC board contained within the PLIIM-based image capture and processing engine of Fig. 42B, showing the field of view of the IFD module in a spatially-overlapping (i.e. coplanar) relation with respect to the PLIBs generated by the PLIAs employed therein;

Fig. 42D is an elevated front view of the PLIIM-based image capture and processing engine of Fig. 42B, showing the PLIAs mounted on opposite sides of its IFD module;

Fig. 43A is a perspective view of a fourth illustrative embodiment of the PLIIM-based hand-supportable linear imager of the present invention which contains within its housing, (1) a PLIIM-based image capture and processing engine comprising a dual-VLD PLIA and a linear CCD image detection array having vertically-elongated image detection elements configured within an optical assembly which employs high-resolution deformable mirror (DM) structure and a cylindrical lens array to provide a despeckling mechanism that operates in accordance with the first generalized method of speckle-pattern noise reduction illustrated in Figs. 1I7A through 1I7C, (2) a LCD display panel for displaying images captured by said engine and information provided by a host computer system or other information supplying device, and (3)

a manual data entry keypad for manually entering data into the imager during diverse types of information-related transactions supported by the PLIIM-based hand-supportable imager;

Fig. 43B is an exploded perspective view of the PLIIM-based image capture and processing engine employed in the hand-supportable imager of Fig. 43A, showing its PLIAs, IFD (i.e. camera) subsystem and associated optical components mounted on an optical-bench/multi-layer PC board, for containment between the upper and lower portions of the engine housing;

Fig. 43C is a plan view of the optical-bench/multi-layer PC board contained within the PLIIM-based image capture and processing engine of Fig. 43B, showing the field of view of the IFD module in a spatially-overlapping relation with respect to the PLIBs generated by the PLIAs employed therein;

Fig. 43D is an elevated front view of the PLIIM-based image capture and processing engine of Fig. 43B, showing the PLIAs mounted on opposite sides of its IFD module;

Fig. 44A is a perspective view of a fifth illustrative embodiment of the PLIIM-based hand-supportable linear imager of the present invention which contains within its housing, (1) a PLIIM-based image capture and processing engine comprising a dual-VLD PLIA and a linear CCD image detection array having vertically-elongated image detection elements configured within an optical assembly that employs a high-resolution phase-only LCD-based phase modulation panel and cylindrical lens array to provide a despeckling mechanism that operates in accordance with the first generalized method of speckle-pattern noise reduction illustrated in Figs. 1I8F and 1I8F, (2) a LCD display panel for displaying images captured by said engine and information provided by a host computer system or other information supplying device, and (3) a manual data entry keypad for manually entering data into the imager during diverse types of information-related transactions supported by the PLIIM-based hand-supportable imager;

Fig. 44B is an exploded perspective view of the PLIIM-based image capture and processing engine employed in the hand-supportable imager of Fig. 44A, showing its PLIAs, IFD (i.e. camera) subsystem and associated optical components mounted on an optical-bench/multi-layer PC board, for containment between the upper and lower portions of the engine housing;

Fig. 44C is a plan view of the optical-bench/multi-layer PC board contained within the PLIIM-based image capture and processing engine of Fig. 44B, showing the field of view of the IFD module in a spatially-overlapping relation with respect to the PLIBs generated by the PLIAs employed therein;

Fig. 45A is a perspective view of a sixth illustrative embodiment of the PLIIM-based hand-supportable linear imager of the present invention which contains within its housing, (1) a PLIIM-based image capture and processing engine comprising a dual-VLD PLIA and a linear

CCD image detection array having vertically-elongated image detection elements configured within an optical assembly that employs a rotating multi-faceted cylindrical lens array structure and cylindrical lens array to provide a despeckling mechanism that operates in accordance with the first generalized method of speckle-pattern noise reduction illustrated in Figs. 1I12A and 1I12B, (2) a LCD display panel for displaying images captured by said engine and information provided by a host computer system or other information supplying device, and (3) a manual data entry keypad for manually entering data into the imager during diverse types of information-related transactions supported by the PLIIM-based hand-supportable imager;

Fig. 45B is an exploded perspective view of the PLIIM-based image capture and processing engine employed in the hand-supportable imager of Fig. 45A, showing its PLIAs, IFD (i.e. camera) subsystem and associated optical components mounted on an optical-bench/multi-layer PC board, for containment between the upper and lower portions of the engine housing;

Fig. 45C is a plan view of the optical-bench/multi-layer PC board contained within the PLIIM-based image capture and processing engine of Fig. 45B, showing the field of view of the IFD module in a spatially-overlapping relation with respect to the PLIBs generated by the PLIAs employed therein;

Fig. 46A is a perspective view of a seventh illustrative embodiment of the PLIIM-based hand-supportable linear imager of the present invention which contains within its housing, (1) a PLIIM-based image capture and processing engine comprising a dual-VLD PLIA and a linear CCD image detection array having vertically-elongated image detection elements configured within an optical assembly that employs a high-speed temporal intensity modulation panel (i.e. optical shutter) to provide a despeckling mechanism that operates in accordance with the second generalized method of speckle-pattern noise reduction illustrated in Figs. 1I14A and 1I14B, (2) a LCD display panel for displaying images captured by said engine and information provided by a host computer system or other information supplying device, and (3) a manual data entry keypad for manually entering data into the imager during diverse types of information-related transactions supported by the PLIIM-based hand-supportable imager;

Fig. 46B is an exploded perspective view of the PLIIM-based image capture and processing engine employed in the hand-supportable imager of Fig. 46A, showing its PLIAs, IFD (i.e. camera) subsystem and associated optical components mounted on an optical-bench/multi-layer PC board, for containment between the upper and lower portions of the engine housing;

Fig. 46C is a plan view of the optical-bench/multi-layer PC board contained within the PLIIM-based image capture and processing engine of Fig. 46B, showing the field of view of the

IFD module in a spatially-overlapping relation with respect to the PLIBs generated by the PLIAs employed therein;

Fig. 47A is a perspective view of an eighth illustrative embodiment of the PLIIM-based hand-supportable linear imager of the present invention which contains within its housing, (1) a PLIIM-based image capture and processing engine comprising a dual-VLD PLIA and a linear CCD image detection array having vertically-elongated image detection elements configured within an optical assembly that employs visible mode-locked laser diode (MLLDs) and cylindrical lens array to provide a despeckling mechanism that operates in accordance with the second generalized method of speckle-pattern noise reduction illustrated in Figs. 1I15C and 1I15D, (2) a LCD display panel for displaying images captured by said engine and information provided by a host computer system or other information supplying device, and (3) a manual data entry keypad for manually entering data into the imager during diverse types of information-related transactions supported by the PLIIM-based hand-supportable imager;

Fig. 47B is an exploded perspective view of the PLIIM-based image capture and processing engine employed in the hand-supportable imager of Fig. 47A, showing its PLIAs, IFD (i.e. camera) subsystem and associated optical components mounted on an optical-bench/multi-layer PC board, for containment between the upper and lower portions of the engine housing;

Fig. 47C is a plan view of the optical-bench/multi-layer PC board contained within the PLIIM-based image capture and processing engine of Fig. 47B, showing the field of view of the IFD module in a spatially-overlapping relation with respect to the PLIBs generated by the PLIAs employed therein;

Fig. 48A is a perspective view of a ninth illustrative embodiment of the PLIIM-based hand-supportable linear imager of the present invention which contains within its housing, (1) a PLIIM-based image capture and processing engine comprising a dual-VLD PLIA and a linear CCD image detection array having vertically-elongated image detection elements configured within an optical assembly that employs an optically-reflective temporal phase modulating structure (e.g. extra-cavity Fabry-Perot etalon) and cylindrical lens array to provide a despeckling mechanism that operates in accordance with the third generalized method of speckle-pattern noise reduction illustrated in Figs. 1I17A and 1I17B, (2) a LCD display panel for displaying images captured by said engine and information provided by a host computer system or other information supplying device, and (3) a manual data entry keypad for manually entering data into the imager during diverse types of information-related transactions supported by the PLIIM-based hand-supportable imager;

Fig. 48B is an exploded perspective view of the PLIIM-based image capture and processing engine employed in the hand-supportable imager of Fig. 48A, showing its PLIAs,

IFD (i.e. camera) subsystem and associated optical components mounted on an optical-bench/multi-layer PC board, for containment between the upper and lower portions of the engine housing;

Fig. 48C is a plan view of the optical-bench/multi-layer PC board contained within the PLIIM-based image capture and processing engine of Fig. 49B, showing the field of view of the IFD module in a spatially-overlapping relation with respect to the PLIBs generated by the PLIAs employed therein;

Fig. 49A is a perspective view of a tenth illustrative embodiment of the PLIIM-based hand-supportable linear imager of the present invention which contains within its housing, (1) a PLIIM-based image capture and processing engine comprising a dual-VLD PLIA and a linear CCD image detection array having vertically-elongated image detection elements configured within an optical assembly that employs a pair of reciprocating spatial intensity modulation panels and cylindrical lens array to provide a despeckling mechanism that operates in accordance with the fifth method generalized method of speckle-pattern noise reduction illustrated in Figs. 1I21A and 1I21D, (2) a LCD display panel for displaying images captured by said engine and information provided by a host computer system or other information supplying device, and (3) a manual data entry keypad for manually entering data into the imager during diverse types of information-related transactions supported by the PLIIM-based hand-supportable imager;

Fig. 49B is an exploded perspective view of the PLIIM-based image capture and processing engine employed in the hand-supportable imager of Fig. 49A, showing its PLIAs, IFD (i.e. camera) subsystem and associated optical components mounted on an optical-bench/multi-layer PC board, for containment between the upper and lower portions of the engine housing;

Fig. 49C is a plan view of the optical-bench/multi-layer PC board contained within the PLIIM-based image capture and processing engine of Fig. 49B, showing the field of view of the IFD module in a spatially-overlapping relation with respect to the PLIBs generated by the PLIAs employed therein;

Fig. 50A is a perspective view of an eleventh illustrative embodiment of the PLIIM-based hand-supportable linear imager of the present invention which contains within its housing, (1) a PLIIM-based image capture and processing engine comprising a dual-VLD PLIA and a linear CCD image detection array having vertically-elongated image detection elements configured within an optical assembly that employs spatial intensity modulation aperture which provides a despeckling mechanism that operates in accordance with the sixth generalized method of speckle-pattern noise reduction illustrated in Figs. 1I22A and 1I22B, (2) a LCD display panel for displaying images captured by said engine and information provided by

a host computer system or other information supplying device, and (3) a manual data entry keypad for manually entering data into the imager during diverse types of information-related transactions supported by the PLIIM-based hand-supportable imager;

Fig. 50B is an exploded perspective view of the PLIIM-based image capture and processing engine employed in the hand-supportable imager of Fig. 50A, showing its PLIAs, IFD module (i.e. camera) subsystem and associated optical components mounted on an optical-bench/multi-layer PC board, for containment between the upper and lower portions of the engine housing;

Fig. 50C is a plan view of the optical-bench/multi-layer PC board contained within the PLIIM-based image capture and processing engine of Fig. 50B, showing the field of view of the IFD module in a spatially-overlapping relation with respect to the PLIBs generated by the PLIAs employed therein;

Fig. 51A is a perspective view of a twelfth illustrative embodiment of the PLIIM-based hand-supportable linear imager of the present invention which contains within its housing, (1) a PLIIM-based image capture and processing engine comprising a dual-VLD PLIA and a linear CCD image detection array having vertically-elongated image detection elements configured within an optical assembly that employs a temporal intensity modulation aperture which provides a despeckling mechanism that operates in accordance with the seventh generalized method of speckle-pattern noise reduction illustrated in Fig. 1I24C, (2) a LCD display panel for displaying images captured by said engine and information provided by a host computer system or other information supplying device, and (3) a manual data entry keypad for manually entering data into the imager during diverse types of information-related transactions supported by the PLIIM-based hand-supportable imager;

Fig. 51B is an exploded perspective view of the PLIIM-based image capture and processing engine employed in the hand-supportable imager of Fig. 51A, showing its PLIAs, IFD (i.e. camera) subsystem and associated optical components mounted on an optical-bench/multi-layer PC board, for containment between the upper and lower portions of the engine housing;

Fig. 51C is a plan view of the optical-bench/multi-layer PC board contained within the PLIIM-based image capture and processing engine of Fig. 51B, showing the field of view of the IFD module in a spatially-overlapping relation with respect to the PLIBs generated by the PLIAs employed therein;

Fig. 52A is a perspective view of a first illustrative embodiment of the PLIIM-based hand-supportable area-type imager of the present invention which contains within its housing, (1) a PLIIM-based image capture and processing engine comprising a dual-VLD PLIA, and a CCD 2-D (area-type) image detection array configured within an optical assembly that employs

a micro-oscillating cylindrical lens array which provides a despeckling mechanism that operates in accordance with the first generalized method of speckle-pattern noise reduction illustrated in Figs. 1I3A through 1I3D, and which also has integrated with its housing, (2) a LCD display panel for displaying images captured by said engine and information provided by a host computer system or other information supplying device, and (3) a manual data entry keypad for manually entering data into the imager during diverse types of information-related transactions supported by the PLIIM-based hand-supportable imager;

Fig. 52B is an exploded perspective view of the PLIIM-based image capture and processing engine employed in the hand-supportable imager of Fig. 52A, showing its PLIAs, IFD module (i.e. camera subsystem) and associated optical components mounted on an optical-bench/multi-layer PC board, for containment between the upper and lower portions of the engine housing;

Fig. 53A1 is a block schematic diagram of a manually-activated version of the PLIIM-based hand-supportable area imager of Fig. 52A, shown configured with (i) an area-type image formation and detection (IFD) module having a fixed focal length/fixed focal distance image formation optics, (ii) a manually-actuated trigger switch for manually activating the planar laser illumination array (driven by a set of VLD driver circuits), the area-type image formation and detection (IFD) module, the image frame grabber, the image data buffer, and the image processing computer, via the camera control computer, in response to the manual activation of the trigger switch, and capturing images of objects (i.e. bearing bar code symbols and other graphical indicia) through the fixed focal length/fixed focal distance image formation optics, and (iii) a LCD display panel and a data entry keypad for supporting diverse types of transactions using the PLIIM-based hand-supportable imager;

Fig. 53A2 is a block schematic diagram of an automatically-activated version of the PLIIM-based hand-supportable area imager of Fig. 52A, shown configured with (i) an area-type image formation and detection (IFD) module having a fixed focal length/fixed focal distance image formation optics, (ii) an IR-based object detection subsystem within its hand-supportable housing for automatically activating in response to the detection of an object in its IR-based object detection field, the planar laser illumination arrays (driven by a set of VLD driver circuits), the area-type image formation and detection (IFD) module, as well as the image frame grabber, the image data buffer, and the image processing computer, via the camera control computer, (ii) a manually-activatable switch for enabling transmission of symbol character data to a host computer system in response to the decoding of a bar code symbol within a captured image frame, and (iii) a LCD display panel and a data entry keypad for supporting diverse types of transactions using the PLIIM-based hand-supportable imager;

Fig. 53A3 is a block schematic diagram of an automatically-activated version of the PLIIM-based hand-supportable area imager of Fig. 52A, shown configured with (i) an area-type image formation and detection (IFD) module having a fixed focal length/fixed focal distance image formation optics, (ii) a laser-based object detection subsystem within its hand-supportable housing for automatically activating the planar laser illumination arrays into a full-power mode of operation, the area-type image formation and detection (IFD) module, the image frame grabber, the image data buffer, and the image processing computer, via the camera control computer, in response to the automatic detection of an object in its laser-based object detection field, (iii) a manually-activatable switch for enabling transmission of symbol character data to a host computer system in response to the decoding of a bar code symbol within a captured image frame; and (iv) a LCD display panel and a data entry keypad for supporting diverse types of transactions using the PLIIM-based hand-supportable imager;

Fig. 53A4 is a block schematic diagram of an automatically-activated version of the PLIIM-based hand-supportable area imager of Fig. 52A, shown configured with (i) an area-type image formation and detection (IFD) module having a fixed focal length/fixed focal distance image formation optics, (ii) an ambient-light driven object detection subsystem within its hand-supportable housing for automatically activating the planar laser illumination arrays (driven by a set of VLD driver circuits), the area-type image formation and detection (IFD) module, the image frame grabber, the image data buffer, and the image processing computer, via the camera control computer, in response to the automatic detection of an object via ambient-light detected by object detection field enabled by the CCD image sensor within the IFD module, (iii) a manually-activatable switch for enabling transmission of symbol character data to a host computer system in response to the decoding of a bar code symbol within a captured image frame, and (iv) a LCD display panel and a data entry keypad for supporting diverse types of transactions using the PLIIM-based hand-supportable imager;

Fig. 53A5 is a block schematic diagram of an automatically-activated version of the PLIIM-based hand-supportable area imager of Fig. 52A, shown configured with (i) an area-type image formation and detection (IFD) module having a fixed focal length/fixed focal distance image formation optics, (ii) an automatic bar code symbol detection subsystem within its hand-supportable housing for automatically activating the image processing computer for decode-processing upon automatic detection of an bar code symbol within its bar code symbol detection field enabled by the CCD image sensor within the IFD module, (iii) a manually-activatable switch for enabling transmission of symbol character data to a host computer system upon decoding a bar code symbol within a captured image frame, and (iv) a LCD display panel and a data entry keypad for supporting diverse types of transactions using the PLIIM-based hand-supportable imager;

Fig. 53B1 is a block schematic diagram of a manually-activated version of the PLIIM-based hand-supportable area imager of Fig. 52A, shown configured with (i) an area-type image formation and detection (IFD) module having a fixed focal length/variable focal distance image formation optics, (ii) a manually-actuated trigger switch for manually activating the planar laser illumination array (driven by a set of VLD driver circuits), the area-type image formation and detection (IFD) module, the image frame grabber, the image data buffer, and the image processing computer, via the camera control computer, in response to the manual activation of the trigger switch, and capturing images of objects (i.e. bearing bar code symbols and other graphical indicia) through the fixed focal length/fixed focal distance image formation optics, and (iii) a LCD display panel and a data entry keypad for supporting diverse types of transactions using the PLIIM-based hand-supportable imager;

Fig. 53B2 is a block schematic diagram of an automatically-activated version of the PLIIM-based hand-supportable area imager of Fig. 52A, shown configured with (i) an area-type image formation and detection (IFD) module having a fixed focal length/variable focal distance image formation optics, (ii) an IR-based object detection subsystem within its hand-supportable housing for automatically activating in response to the detection of an object in its IR-based object detection field, the planar laser illumination array (driven by a set of VLD driver circuits), the area-type image formation and detection (IFD) module, as well as the image frame grabber, the image data buffer, and the image processing computer, via the camera control computer, (ii) a manually-activatable switch for enabling transmission of symbol character data to a host computer system in response to the decoding of a bar code symbol within a captured image frame, and (iii) a LCD display panel and a data entry keypad for supporting diverse types of transactions using the PLIIM-based hand-supportable imager;

Fig. 53B3 is a block schematic diagram of an automatically-activated version of the PLIIM-based hand-supportable area imager of Fig. 52A, shown configured with (i) an area-type image formation and detection (IFD) module having a fixed focal length/variable focal distance image formation optics, (ii) a laser-based object detection subsystem within its hand-supportable housing for automatically activating the planar laser illumination array into a full-power mode of operation, the area-type image formation and detection (IFD) module, the image frame grabber, the image data buffer, and the image processing computer, via the camera control computer, in response to the automatic detection of an object in its laser-based object detection field, (iii) a manually-activatable switch for enabling transmission of symbol character data to a host computer system in response to the decoding of a bar code symbol within a captured image frame, and (iv) a LCD display panel and a data entry keypad for supporting diverse types of transactions using the PLIIM-based hand-supportable imager;

Fig. 53B4 is a block schematic diagram of an automatically-activated version of the PLIIM-based hand-supportable area imager of Fig. 52A, shown configured with (i) an area-type image formation and detection (IFD) module having a fixed focal length/variable focal distance image formation optics, (ii) an ambient-light driven object detection subsystem within its hand-supportable housing for automatically activating the planar laser illumination array (driven by a set of VLD driver circuits), the area-type image formation and detection (IFD) module, the image frame grabber, the image data buffer, and the image processing computer, via the camera control computer, in response to the automatic detection of an object via ambient-light detected by object detection field enabled by the CCD image sensor within the IFD module, and (iii) a manually-activatable switch for enabling transmission of symbol character data to a host computer system in response to the decoding of a bar code symbol within a captured image frame;

Fig. 53B5 is a block schematic diagram of an automatically-activated version of the PLIIM-based hand-supportable area imager of Fig. 52A, shown configured with (i) an area-type image formation and detection (IFD) module having a fixed focal length/variable focal distance image formation optics, (ii) an automatic bar code symbol detection subsystem within its hand-supportable housing for automatically activating the planar laser illumination arrays (driven by a set of VLD driver circuits), the area-type image formation and detection (IFD) module, the image frame grabber, the image data buffer, and the image processing computer for decode-processing in response to the automatic detection of an bar code symbol within its bar code symbol detection field enabled by the CCD image sensor within the IFD module, (iii) a manually-activatable switch for enabling transmission of symbol character data to a host computer system in response to the decoding of a bar code symbol within a captured image frame, and (iv) a LCD display panel and a data entry keypad for supporting diverse types of transactions using the PLIIM-based hand-supportable imager;

Fig. 53C1 is a block schematic diagram of a manually-activated version of the PLIIM-based hand-supportable area imager of Fig. 52A, shown configured with (i) an area-type image formation and detection (IFD) module having a variable focal length/variable focal distance image formation optics, (ii) a manually-actuated trigger switch for manually activating the planar laser illumination array (driven by a set of VLD driver circuits), the area-type image formation and detection (IFD) module, the image frame grabber, the image data buffer, and the image processing computer, via the camera control computer, in response to the manual activation of the trigger switch, and capturing images of objects (i.e. bearing bar code symbols and other graphical indicia) through the fixed focal length/fixed focal distance image formation optics, and (iii) a LCD display panel and a data entry keypad for supporting diverse types of transactions using the PLIIM-based hand-supportable imager;

Fig. 53C2 is a block schematic diagram of an automatically-activated version of the PLIIM-based hand-supportable area imager of Fig. 52A, shown configured with (i) a area-type image formation and detection (IFD) module having a variable focal length/variable focal distance image formation optics, (ii) an IR-based object detection subsystem within its hand-supportable housing for automatically activating upon detection of an object in its IR-based object detection field, the planar laser illumination array (driven by a set of VLD driver circuits), the area-type image formation and detection (IFD) module, as well as the image frame grabber, the image data buffer, and the image processing computer, via the camera control computer, (ii) a manually-activatable switch for enabling transmission of symbol character data to a host computer system in response to the decoding a bar code symbol within a captured image frame, and (iii) a LCD display panel and a data entry keypad for supporting diverse types of transactions using the PLIIM-based hand-supportable imager;

Fig. 53C3 is a block schematic diagram of an automatically-activated version of the PLIIM-based hand-supportable area imager of Fig. 52A, shown configured with (i) an area-type image formation and detection (IFD) module having a variable focal length/variable focal distance image formation optics, (ii) a laser-based object detection subsystem within its hand-supportable housing for automatically activating the planar laser illumination array into a full-power mode of operation, the area-type image formation and detection (IFD) module, the image frame grabber, the image data buffer, and the image processing computer, via the camera control computer, in response to the automatic detection of an object in its laser-based object detection field, (iii) a manually-activatable switch for enabling transmission of symbol character data to a host computer system in response to the decoding a bar code symbol within a captured image frame, and (iv) a LCD display panel and a data entry keypad for supporting diverse types of transactions using the PLIIM-based hand-supportable imager;

Fig. 53C4 is a block schematic diagram of an automatically-activated version of the PLIIM-based hand-supportable area imager of Fig. 52A system, shown configured with (i) an area-type image formation and detection (IFD) module having a variable focal length/variable focal distance image formation optics, (ii) an ambient-light driven object detection subsystem within its hand-supportable housing for automatically activating the planar laser illumination arrays (driven by a set of VLD driver circuits), the area-type image formation and detection (IFD) module, the image frame grabber, the image data buffer, and the image processing computer, via the camera control computer, in response to the automatic detection of an object via ambient-light detected by object detection field enabled by the CCD image sensor within the IFD module, (iii) a manually-activatable switch for enabling transmission of symbol character data to a host computer system in response to the decoding of a bar code symbol within a

captured image frame, and (iv) a LCD display panel and a data entry keypad for supporting diverse types of transactions using the PLIIM-based hand-supportable imager;

Fig. 53C5 is a block schematic diagram of an automatically-activated version of the PLIIM-based hand-supportable area imager of Fig. 52A system, shown configured with (i) an area-type image formation and detection (IFD) module having a variable focal length/variable focal distance image formation optics, (ii) an automatic bar code symbol detection subsystem within its hand-supportable housing for automatically activating the planar laser illumination arrays (driven by a set of VLD driver circuits), the area-type image formation and detection (IFD) module, the image frame grabber, the image data buffer, and the image processing computer for decode-processing in response to the automatic detection of an bar code symbol within its bar code symbol detection field enabled by the CCD image sensor within the IFD module, (iii) a manually-activatable switch for enabling transmission of symbol character data to a host computer system in response to decoding a bar code symbol within a captured image frame, and (iv) a LCD display panel and a data entry keypad for supporting diverse types of transactions using the PLIIM-based hand-supportable imager;

Fig. 54A is a perspective view of a second illustrative embodiment of the PLIIM-based hand-supportable area imager of the present invention which contains within its housing, (1) a PLIIM-based image capture and processing engine comprising a dual-VLD PLIA and a area CCD image detection array configured within an optical assembly which employs a micro-oscillating light reflective element and a cylindrical lens array to provide a despeckling mechanism that operates in accordance with the first generalized method of speckle-pattern noise reduction illustrated in Figs. 1I5A through 1I5D, (2) a LCD display panel for displaying images captured by said engine and information provided by a host computer system or other information supplying device, and (3) a manual data entry keypad for manually entering data into the imager during diverse types of information-related transactions supported by the PLIIM-based hand-supportable imager;

Fig. 54B is an exploded perspective view of the PLIIM-based image capture and processing engine employed in the hand-supportable area imager of Fig. 54A, showing its PLIAs, IFD module (i.e. camera subsystem) and associated optical components mounted on an optical-bench/multi-layer PC board, for containment between the upper and lower portions of the engine housing;

Fig. 55A is a perspective view of a third illustrative embodiment of the PLIIM-based hand-supportable area imager of the present invention which contains within its housing, a PLIIM-based image capture and processing engine comprising a dual-VLD PLIA and a 2-D CCD image detection array configured within an optical assembly that employs an acousto-electric Bragg cell structure and a cylindrical lens array to provide a despeckling mechanism

that operates in accordance with the first generalized method of speckle-pattern noise reduction illustrated in Figs. 1I6A and 1I6B, (2) a LCD display panel for displaying images captured by said engine and information provided by a host computer system or other information supplying device, and (3) a manual data entry keypad for manually entering data into the imager during diverse types of information-related transactions supported by the PLIIM-based hand-supportable imager;

Fig. 55B is an exploded perspective view of the PLIIM-based image capture and processing engine employed in the hand-supportable area imager of Fig. 55A, showing its PLIAs, IFD (i.e. camera) subsystem and associated optical components mounted on an optical-bench/multi-layer PC board, for containment between the upper and lower portions of the engine housing;

Fig. 56A is a perspective view of a fourth illustrative embodiment of the PLIIM-based hand-supportable area imager of the present invention which contains within its housing, (1) a PLIIM-based image capture and processing engine comprising a dual-VLD PLIA and a 2-D CCD image detection array configured within an optical assembly that employs a high spatial-resolution piezo-electric driven deformable mirror (DM) structure and a cylindrical lens array to provide a despeckling mechanism that operates in accordance with the first generalized method of speckle-pattern noise reduction illustrated in Figs. 1I7A and 1I7C, (2) a LCD display panel for displaying images captured by said engine and information provided by a host computer system or other information supplying device, and (3) a manual data entry keypad for manually entering data into the imager during diverse types of information-related transactions supported by the PLIIM-based hand-supportable imager;

Fig. 56B is an exploded perspective view of the PLIIM-based image capture and processing engine employed in the hand-supportable area imager of Fig. 56A, showing its PLIAs, (2) IFD (i.e. camera) subsystem and associated optical components mounted on an optical-bench/multi-layer PC board, for containment between the upper and lower portions of the engine housing;

Fig. 57A is a perspective view of a fifth illustrative embodiment of the PLIIM-based hand-supportable area imager of the present invention which contains within its housing, (1) a PLIIM-based image capture and processing engine comprising a dual-VLD PLIA and a 2-D CCD image detection array configured within an optical assembly that employs a spatial-only liquid crystal display (PO-LCD) type spatial phase modulation panel and cylindrical lens array to provide a despeckling mechanism that operates in accordance with the first generalized method of speckle-pattern noise reduction illustrated in Figs. 1I8F and 1I8G, (2) a LCD display panel for displaying images captured by said engine and information provided by a host computer system or other information supplying device, and (3) a manual data entry keypad

for manually entering data into the imager during diverse types of information-related transactions supported by the PLIIM-based hand-supportable imager;

Fig. 57B is an exploded perspective view of the PLIIM-based image capture and processing engine employed in the hand-supportable area imager of Fig. 57A, showing its PLIAs, IFD module (i.e. camera subsystem) and associated optical components mounted on an optical-bench/multi-layer PC board, for containment between the upper and lower portions of the engine housing;

Fig. 58A is a perspective view of a sixth illustrative embodiment of the PLIIM-based hand-supportable area imager of the present invention which contains within its housing, a PLIIM-based image capture and processing engine comprising a dual-VLD PLIA and a 2-D CCD image detection array configured within an optical assembly that employs a high-speed optical shutter and cylindrical lens array to provide a despeckling mechanism that operates in accordance with the second generalized method of speckle-pattern noise reduction illustrated in Figs. 1I14A and 1I14B, (2) a LCD display panel for displaying images captured by said engine and information provided by a host computer system or other information supplying device, and (3) a manual data entry keypad for manually entering data into the imager during diverse types of information-related transactions supported by the PLIIM-based hand-supportable imager;

Fig. 58B is an exploded perspective view of the PLIIM-based image capture and processing engine employed in the hand-supportable area imager of Fig. 58A, showing its PLIAs, IFD (i.e. camera) subsystem and associated optical components mounted on an optical-bench/multi-layer PC board, for containment between the upper and lower portions of the engine housing;

Fig. 59A is a perspective view of a seventh illustrative embodiment of the PLIIM-based hand-supportable area imager of the present invention which contains within its housing, a PLIIM-based image capture and processing engine comprising a dual-VLD PLIA and a 2-D CCD image detection array configured within an optical assembly that employs a visible mode locked laser diode (MLLD) and cylindrical lens array to provide a despeckling mechanism that operates in accordance with the second generalized method of speckle-pattern noise reduction illustrated in Figs. 1I15A and 1I15B, (2) a LCD display panel for displaying images captured by said engine and information provided by a host computer system or other information supplying device, and (3) a manual data entry keypad for manually entering data into the imager during diverse types of information-related transactions supported by the PLIIM-based hand-supportable imager;

Fig. 59B is an exploded perspective view of the PLIIM-based image capture and processing engine employed in the hand-supportable area imager of Fig. 58A, showing its

PLIAs, IFD module (i.e. camera subsystem) and associated optical components mounted on an optical-bench/multi-layer PC board, for containment between the upper and lower portions of the engine housing;

Fig. 60A is a perspective view of a eighth illustrative embodiment of the PLIIM-based hand-supportable area imager of the present invention which contains within its housing, (1) a PLIIM-based image capture and processing engine comprising a dual-VLD PLIA and a 2-D CCD image detection array configured within an optical assembly that employs an electrically-passive optically-reflective external cavity (i.e. etalon) and cylindrical lens array to provide a despeckling mechanism that operates in accordance with the third method generalized method of speckle-pattern noise reduction illustrated in Figs. 1I17A and 1I17B, (2) a LCD display panel for displaying images captured by said engine and information provided by a host computer system or other information supplying device, and (3) a manual data entry keypad for manually entering data into the imager during diverse types of information-related transactions supported by the PLIIM-based hand-supportable imager;

Fig. 60B is an exploded perspective view of the PLIIM-based image capture and processing engine employed in the hand-supportable imager of Fig. 60A, showing its PLIAs, IFD module (i.e. camera subsystem) and associated optical components mounted on an optical-bench/multi-layer PC board, for containment between the upper and lower portions of the engine housing;

Fig. 61A is a perspective view of a ninth illustrative embodiment of the PLIIM-based hand-supportable area imager of the present invention which contains within its housing, (1) a PLIIM-based image capture and processing engine comprising a dual-VLD PLIA and a 2-D CCD image detection array configured within an optical assembly that employs an mode-hopping VLD drive circuitry and a cylindrical lens array to provide a despeckling mechanism that operates in accordance with the fourth generalized method of speckle-pattern noise reduction illustrated in Figs. 1I19A and 1I19B, (2) a LCD display panel for displaying images captured by said engine and information provided by a host computer system or other information supplying device, and (3) a manual data entry keypad for manually entering data into the imager during diverse types of information-related transactions supported by the PLIIM-based hand-supportable imager;

Fig. 61B is an exploded perspective view of the PLIIM-based image capture and processing engine employed in the hand-supportable area imager of Fig. 61A, showing its PLIAs, IFD (i.e. camera) subsystem and associated optical components mounted on an optical-bench/multi-layer PC board, for containment between the upper and lower portions of the engine housing;

Fig. 62A is a perspective view of a tenth illustrative embodiment of the PLIIM-based hand-supportable area imager of the present invention which contains within its housing, (1) a PLIIM-based image capture and processing engine comprising a dual-VLD PLIA and a 2-D CCD image detection array configured within an optical assembly that employs a pair of micro-oscillating spatial intensity modulation panels and cylindrical lens array to provide a despeckling mechanism that operates in accordance with the fifth method generalized method of speckle-pattern noise reduction illustrated in Figs. 1I21A and 1I21D, (2) a LCD display panel for displaying images captured by said engine and information provided by a host computer system or other information supplying device, and (3) a manual data entry keypad for manually entering data into the imager during diverse types of information-related transactions supported by the PLIIM-based hand-supportable imager;

Fig. 62B is an exploded perspective view of the PLIIM-based image capture and processing engine employed in the hand-supportable area imager of Fig. 62A, showing its PLIAs, IFD module (i.e. camera subsystem) and associated optical components mounted on an optical-bench/multi-layer PC board, for containment between the upper and lower portions of the engine housing;

Fig. 63A is a perspective view of a eleventh illustrative embodiment of the PLIIM-based hand-supportable area imager of the present invention which contains within its housing, (1) a PLIIM-based image capture and processing engine comprising a dual-VLD PLIA and a 2-D CCD image detection array configured within an optical assembly that employs a electro-optical or mechanically rotating aperture (i.e. iris) disposed before the entrance pupil of the IFD module, to provide a despeckling mechanism that operates in accordance with the sixth method generalized method of speckle-pattern noise reduction illustrated in Figs. 1I23A and 1I23B, (2) a LCD display panel for displaying images captured by said engine and information provided by a host computer system or other information supplying device, and (3) a manual data entry keypad for manually entering data into the imager during diverse types of information-related transactions supported by the PLIIM-based hand-supportable imager;

Fig. 63B is an exploded perspective view of the PLIIM-based image capture and processing engine employed in the hand-supportable area imager of Fig. 62A, showing its PLIAs, IFD module (i.e. camera subsystem) and associated optical components mounted on an optical-bench/multi-layer PC board, for containment between the upper and lower portions of the engine housing;

Fig. 64A is a perspective view of a twelfth illustrative embodiment of the PLIIM-based hand-supportable area imager of the present invention which contains within its housing, (1) a PLIIM-based image capture and processing engine comprising a dual-VLD PLIA and a 2-D CCD image detection array configured within an optical assembly that employs a high-speed

electro-optical shutter disposed before the entrance pupil of the IFD module, to provide a despeckling mechanism that operates in accordance with the seventh generalized method of speckle-pattern noise reduction illustrated in Figs. 1I24A-1I24C, (2) a LCD display panel for displaying images captured by said engine and information provided by a host computer system or other information supplying device, and (3) a manual data entry keypad for manually entering data into the imager during diverse types of information-related transactions supported by the PLIIM-based hand-supportable imager;

Fig. 64B is an exploded perspective view of the PLIIM-based image capture and processing engine employed in the hand-supportable area imager of Fig. 64A, showing its PLIAs, IFD module (i.e. camera subsystem) and associated optical components mounted on an optical-bench/multi-layer PC board, for containment between the upper and lower portions of the engine housing;

Fig. 65A is a perspective view of a first illustrative embodiment of an LED-based PLIM for best use in PLIIM-based systems having relatively short working distances (e.g. less than 18 inches or so), wherein a linear-type LED, an optional focusing lens element and a cylindrical lens element are each mounted within compact barrel structure, for the purpose of producing a spatially-incoherent planar light illumination beam (PLIB) therefrom;

Fig. 65B is a schematic presentation of the optical process carried within the LED-based PLIM shown in Fig. 65A, wherein (1) the focusing lens focuses a reduced-size image of the light emitting source of the LED towards the farthest working distance in the PLIIM-based system, and (2) the light rays associated with the reduced-size of the image LED source are transmitted through the cylindrical lens element to produce a spatially-incoherent planar light illumination beam (PLIB), as shown in Fig. 65A;

Fig. 66A is a perspective view of a second illustrative embodiment of an LED-based PLIM for best use in PLIIM-based systems having relatively short working distances, wherein a linear-type LED, a focusing lens element, collimating lens element and a cylindrical lens element are each mounted within compact barrel structure, for the purpose of producing a spatially-incoherent planar light illumination beam (PLIB) therefrom;

Fig. 66B is a schematic presentation of the optical process carried within the LED-based PLIM shown in Fig. 66A, wherein (1) the focusing lens element focuses a reduced-size image of the light emitting source of the LED towards a focal point within the barrel structure, (2) the collimating lens element collimates the light rays associated with the reduced-size image of the light emitting source, and (3) the cylindrical lens element diverges (i.e. spreads) the collimated light beam so as to produce a spatially-incoherent planar light illumination beam (PLIB), as shown in Fig. 66A;

Fig. 67A is a perspective view of a third illustrative embodiment of an LED-based PLIM chip for best use in PLIIM-based systems having relatively short working distances, wherein a linear-type light emitting diode (LED) array, a focusing-type microlens array, collimating type microlens array, and a cylindrical-type microlens array are each mounted within the IC package of the PLIM chip, for the purpose of producing a spatially-incoherent planar light illumination beam (PLIB) therefrom;

Fig. 67B is a schematic presentation of the optical process carried within the LED-based PLIM shown in Fig. 67A, wherein (1) each focusing lenslet focuses a reduced-size image of a light emitting source of an LED towards a focal point above the focusing-type microlens array, (2) each collimating lenslet collimates the light rays associated with the reduced-size image of the light emitting source, and (3) each cylindrical lenslet diverges the collimated light beam so as to produce a spatially-incoherent planar light illumination beam (PLIB) component, as shown in Fig. 66A, which collectively produce a composite spatially-incoherent PLIB from the LED-based PLIM;

Fig. 68A is a schematic block system diagram off the airport security system of the present invention shown comprising x-ray baggage scanners, PLIIM-based passenger and baggage identification, profiling and tracking subsystems, internetworked passenger and baggage relational database management subsystems (RDBMS), and automated data processing subsystems for operating on collected passenger and baggage data stored therein, to detecting security condition during and after passengers and baggage are checked into an airport; and

Fig. 68B is a schematic representation of an exemplary passenger and baggage database record created and maintained by the airport security system shown in Fig. 68A.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE ILLUSTRATIVE EMBODIMENTS OF THE PRESENT INVENTION

Referring to the figures in the accompanying Drawings, the preferred embodiments of the Planar Light Illumination and (Electronic) Imaging (PLIIM) System of the present invention will be described in great detail, wherein like elements will be indicated using like reference numerals.

Overview of the Planar Laser Illumination And Electronic Imaging (PLIIM) System Of The Present Invention

In accordance with the principles of the present invention, an object (e.g. a bar coded package, textual materials, graphical indicia, etc.) is illuminated by a substantially planar light

illumination beam (PLIB), preferably a planar laser illumination beam, having substantially-planar spatial distribution characteristics along a planar direction which passes through the field of view (FOV) of an image formation and detection module (e.g. realized within a CCD-type digital electronic camera, a 35 mm optical-film photographic camera , or on a semiconductor chip as shown in Figs. 37 through 38B hereof), along substantially the entire working (i.e. object) distance of the camera, while images of the illuminated target object are formed and detected by the image formation and detection (i.e. camera) module.

This inventive principle of coplanar light illumination and image formation is embodied in two different classes of the PLIIM-based systems, namely: (1) in PLIIM systems shown in Figs. 1A, 1V1, 2A, 2I1, 3A, and 3J1, wherein the image formation and detection modules in these systems employ linear-type (1-D) image detection arrays; and (2) in PLIIM-based systems shown in Figs. 4A, 5A and 6A, wherein the image formation and detection modules in these systems employ area-type (2-D) image detection arrays. Such image detection arrays can be realized using CCD, CMOS or other technologies currently known in the art or to be developed in the distance future. Among these illustrative systems, those shown in Figs. 1A, 2A and 3A each produce a planar laser illumination beam that is neither scanned nor deflected relative to the system housing during planar laser illumination and image detection operations and thus can be said to use "stationary" planar laser illumination beams to read relatively moving bar code symbol structures and other graphical indicia. Those systems shown in Figs. 1V1, 2I1, 3J1, 4A, 5A and 6A, each produce a planar laser illumination beam that is scanned (i.e. deflected) relative to the system housing during planar laser illumination and image detection operations and thus can be said to use "moving" planar laser illumination beams to read relatively stationary bar code symbol structures and other graphical indicia.

In each such system embodiments, it is preferred that each planar laser illumination beam is focused so that the minimum beam width thereof (e.g. 0.6 mm along its non-spreading direction, as shown in Fig. 1I2) occurs at a point or plane which is the farthest or maximum working (i.e. object) distance at which the system is designed to acquire images of objects, as best shown in Fig. 1I2. Hereinafter, this aspect of the present invention shall be deemed the "Focus Beam At Farthest Object Distance (FBAFOD)" principle.

In the case where a fixed focal length imaging subsystem is employed in the PLIIM-based system, the FBAFOD principle helps compensate for decreases in the power density of the incident planar laser illumination beam due to the fact that the width of the planar laser illumination beam increases in length for increasing object distances away from the imaging subsystem.

In the case where a variable focal length (i.e. zoom) imaging subsystem is employed in the PLIIM-based system, the FBAFOD principle helps compensate for (i) decreases in the power

density of the incident planar illumination beam due to the fact that the width of the planar laser illumination beam increases in length for increasing object distances away from the imaging subsystem, and (ii) any $1/r^2$ type losses that would typically occur when using the planar laser planar illumination beam of the present invention.

By virtue of the present invention, scanned objects need only be illuminated along a single plane which is coplanar with a planar section of the field of view of the image formation and detection module (e.g. camera) during illumination and imaging operations carried out by the PLIIM-based system. This enables the use of low-power, light-weight, high-response, ultra-compact, high-efficiency solid-state illumination producing devices, such as visible laser diodes (VLDs), to selectively illuminate ultra-narrow sections of an object during image formation and detection operations, in contrast with high-power, low-response, heavy-weight, bulky, low-efficiency lighting equipment (e.g. sodium vapor lights) required by prior art illumination and image detection systems. In addition, the planar laser illumination techniques of the present invention enables high-speed modulation of the planar laser illumination beam, and use of simple (i.e. substantially-monochromatic wavelength) lens designs for substantially-monochromatic optical illumination and image formation and detection operations.

As will be illustrated in greater detail hereinafter, PLIIM-based systems embodying the "planar laser illumination" and "FBAFOD" principles of the present invention can be embodied within a wide variety of bar code symbol reading and scanning systems, as well as image-lift and optical character, text, and image recognition systems and devices well known in the art.

In general, bar code symbol reading systems can be grouped into at least two general scanner categories, namely: industrial scanners; and point-of-sale (POS) scanners.

An industrial scanner is a scanner that has been designed for use in a warehouse or shipping application where large numbers of packages must be scanned in rapid succession. Industrial scanners include conveyor-type scanners, and hold-under scanners. These scanner categories will be described in greater detail below

Conveyor scanners are designed to scan packages as they move by on a conveyor belt. In general, a minimum of six conveyors (e.g. one overhead scanner, four side scanners, and one bottom scanner) are necessary to obtain complete coverage of the conveyor belt and ensure that any label will be scanned no matter where on a package it appears. Conveyor scanners can be further grouped into top, side, and bottom scanners which will be briefly summarized below.

Top scanners are mounted above the conveyor belt and look down at the tops of packages transported therealong. It might be desirable to angle the scanner's field of view slightly in the direction from which the packages approach or that in which they recede depending on the shapes of the packages being scanned. A top scanner generally has less severe depth of field and variable focus or dynamic focus requirements compared to a side

scanner as the tops of packages are usually fairly flat, at least compared to the extreme angles that a side scanner might have to encounter during scanning operations.

Side scanners are mounted beside the conveyor belt and scan the sides of packages transported therealong. It might be desirable to angle the scanner's field of view slightly in the direction from which the packages approach or that in which they recede depending on the shapes of the packages being scanned and the range of angles at which the packages might be rotated.

Side scanners generally have more severe depth of field and variable focus or dynamic focus requirements compared to a top scanner because of the great range of angles at which the sides of the packages may be oriented with respect to the scanner (this assumes that the packages can have random rotational orientations; if an apparatus upstream on the on the conveyor forces the packages into consistent orientations, the difficulty of the side scanning task is lessened). Because side scanners can accommodate greater variation in object distance over the surface of a single target object, side scanners can be mounted in the usual position of a top scanner for applications in which package tops are severely angled.

Bottom scanners are mounted beneath the conveyor and scans the bottoms of packages by looking up through a break in the belt that is covered by glass to keep dirt off the scanner. Bottom scanners generally do not have to be variably or dynamically focused because its working distance is roughly constant, assuming that the packages are intended to be in contact with the conveyor belt under normal operating conditions. However, boxes tend to bounce around as they travel on the belt, and this behavior can be amplified when a package crosses the break, where one belt section ends and another begins after a gap of several inches. For this reason, bottom scanners must have a large depth of field to accommodate these random motions, to which a variable or dynamic focus system could not react quickly enough.

Hold-under scanners are designed to scan packages that are picked up and held underneath it. The package is then manually routed or otherwise handled, perhaps based on the result of the scanning operation. Hold-under scanners are generally mounted so that its viewing optics are oriented in downward direction, like a library bar code scanner. Depth of field (DOF) is an important characteristic for hold-under scanners, because the operator will not be able to hold the package perfectly still while the image is being acquired.

Point-of-sale (POS) scanners are typically designed to be used at a retail establishment to determine the price of an item being purchased. POS scanners are generally smaller than industrial scanner models, with more artistic and ergonomic case designs. Small size, low weight, resistance to damage from accident drops and user comfort, are all major design factors for POS scanner. POS scanners include hand-held scanners, hands-free presentation scanners

and combination-type scanners supporting both hands-on and hands-free modes of operation. These scanner categories will be described in greater detail below.

Hand-held scanners are designed to be picked up by the operator and aimed at the label to be scanned.

Hands-free presentation scanners are designed to remain stationary and have the item to be scanned picked up and passed in front of the scanning device. Presentation scanners can be mounted on counters looking horizontally, embedded flush with the counter looking vertically, or partially embedded in the counter looking vertically, but having a “tower” portion which rises out above the counter and looks horizontally to accomplish multiple-sided scanning. If necessary, presentation scanners that are mounted in a counter surface can also include a scale to measure weights of items.

Some POS scanners can be used as handheld units or mounted in stands to serve as presentation scanners, depending on which is more convenient for the operator based on the item that must be scanned.

Various generalized embodiments of the PLIIM system of the present invention will now be described in great detail, and after each generalized embodiment, various applications thereof will be described.

First Generalized Embodiment Of The PLIIM-Based System Of The Present Invention

The first generalized embodiment of the PLIIM-based system of the present invention 1 is illustrated in Fig. 1A. As shown therein, the PLIIM-based system 1 comprises: a housing 2 of compact construction; a linear (i.e. 1-dimensional) type image formation and detection (IFD) module 3 including a 1-D electronic image detection array 3A, and a linear (1-D) imaging subsystem (LIS) 3B having a fixed focal length, a fixed focal distance, and a fixed field of view (FOV), for forming a 1-D image of an illuminated object 4 located within the fixed focal distance and FOV thereof and projected onto the 1-D image detection array 3A, so that the 1-D image detection array 3A can electronically detect the image formed thereon and automatically produce a digital image data set 5 representative of the detected image for subsequent image processing; and a pair of planar laser illumination arrays (PLIAs) 6A and 6B, each mounted on opposite sides of the IFD module 3, such that each planar laser illumination array 6A and 6B produces a plane of laser beam illumination 7A, 7B which is disposed substantially coplanar with the field view of the image formation and detection module 3 during object illumination and image detection operations carried out by the PLIIM-based system.

An image formation and detection (IFD) module 3 having an imaging lens with a fixed focal length has a constant angular field of view (FOV), that is, the imaging subsystem can view more of the target object's surface as the target object is moved further away from the IFD module. A major disadvantage to this type of imaging lens is that the resolution of the image that is acquired, expressed in terms of pixels or dots per inch (dpi), varies as a function of the distance from the target object to the imaging lens. However, a fixed focal length imaging lens is easier and less expensive to design and produce than a zoom-type imaging lens which will be discussed in detail hereinbelow with reference to Figs. 3A through 3J4.

The distance from the imaging lens 3B to the image detecting (i.e. sensing) array 3A is referred to as the image distance. The distance from the target object 4 to the imaging lens 3B is called the object distance. The relationship between the object distance (where the object resides) and the image distance (at which the image detection array is mounted) is a function of the characteristics of the imaging lens, and assuming a thin lens, is determined by the thin (imaging) lens equation (1) defined below in greater detail. Depending on the image distance, light reflected from a target object at the object distance will be brought into sharp focus on the detection array plane. If the image distance remains constant and the target object is moved to a new object distance, the imaging lens might not be able to bring the light reflected off the target object (at this new distance) into sharp focus. An image formation and detection (IFD) module having an imaging lens with fixed focal distance cannot adjust its image distance to compensate for a change in the target's object distance; all the component lens elements in the imaging

subsystem remain stationary. Therefore, the depth of field (DOF) of the imaging subsystems alone must be sufficient to accommodate all possible object distances and orientations. Such basic optical terms and concepts will be discussed in more formal detail hereinafter with reference to Figs. 1J1 and 1J6.

In accordance with the present invention, the planar laser illumination arrays 6A and 6B, the linear image formation and detection (IFD) module 3, and any non-moving FOV and/or planar laser illumination beam folding mirrors employed in any particular system configuration described herein, are fixedly mounted on an optical bench 8 or chassis so as to prevent any relative motion (which might be caused by vibration or temperature changes) between: (i) the image forming optics (e.g. imaging lens) within the image formation and detection module 3 and any stationary FOV folding mirrors employed therewith; and (ii) each planar laser illumination array (i.e. VLD/cylindrical lens assembly) 6A, 6B and any planar laser illumination beam folding mirrors employed in the PLIIM system configuration. Preferably, the chassis assembly should provide for easy and secure alignment of all optical components employed in the planar laser illumination arrays 6A and 6B as well as the image formation and detection module 3, as well as be easy to manufacture, service and repair. Also, this PLIIM-based system 1 employs the general "planar laser illumination" and "focus beam at farthest object distance (FBAFOD)" principles described above. Various illustrative embodiments of this generalized PLIIM-based system will be described below.

First Illustrative Embodiment Of The PLIIM-Based System Of The Present Invention Shown In Fig. 1A

The first illustrative embodiment of the PLIIM-based system 1A of Fig. 1A is shown in Fig. 1B1. As illustrated therein, the field of view of the image formation and detection module 3 is folded in the downwardly direction by a field of view (FOV) folding mirror 9 so that both the folded field of view 10 and resulting first and second planar laser illumination beams 7A and 7B produced by the planar illumination arrays 6A and 6B, respectively, are arranged in a substantially coplanar relationship during object illumination and image detection operations. One primary advantage of this system design is that it enables a construction having an ultra-low height profile suitable, for example, in unitary package identification and dimensioning systems of the type disclosed in Figs. 17-22, wherein the image-based bar code symbol reader needs to be installed within a compartment (or cavity) of a housing having relatively low height dimensions. Also, in this system design, there is a relatively high degree of freedom provided in where the image formation and detection module 3 can be mounted on the optical bench of the

system, thus enabling the field of view (FOV) folding technique disclosed in Fig. 1L1 to practiced in a relatively easy manner.

The PLIIM system 1A illustrated in Fig. 1B1 is shown in greater detail in Figs. 1B2 and 1B3. As shown therein, the linear image formation and detection module 3 is shown comprising an imaging subsystem 3B, and a linear array of photo-electronic detectors 3A realized using high-speed CCD technology (e.g. Dalsa IT-P4 Linear Image Sensors, from Dalsa, Inc. located on the WWW at http://www.dalsa.com). As shown, each planar laser illumination array 6A, 6B comprises a plurality of planar laser illumination modules (PLIMs) 11A through 11F, closely arranged relative to each other, in a rectilinear fashion. For purposes of clarity, each PLIM is indicated by reference numeral. As shown in Figs. 1K1 and 1K2, the relative spacing of each PLIM is such that the spatial intensity distribution of the individual planar laser beams superimpose and additively provide a substantially uniform composite spatial intensity distribution for the entire planar laser illumination array 6A and 6B.

In Fig. 1B3, greater focus is accorded to the planar light illumination beam (PLIB) and the magnified field of view (FOV) projected onto an object during conveyor-type illumination and imaging applications, as shown in Fig. 1B1. As shown in Fig. 1B3, the height dimension of the PLIB is substantially greater than the height dimension of each image detection element in the linear CCD image detection array so as to decrease the range of tolerance that must be maintained between the PLIB and the FOV. This simplifies construction and maintenance of such PLIIM-based systems. In Figs. 1B4 and 1B5, an exemplary mechanism is shown for adjustably mounting each VLD in the PLIA so that the desired beam profile characteristics can be achieved during calibration of each PLIA. As illustrated in Fig. 1B4, each VLD block in the illustrative embodiment is designed to tilt plus or minus 2 degrees relative to the horizontal reference plane of the PLIA. Such inventive features will be described in greater detail hereinafter.

Fig. 1C is a schematic representation of a single planar laser illumination module (PLIM) 11 used to construct each planar laser illumination array 6A, 6B shown in Fig. 1B2. As shown in Fig. 1C, the planar laser illumination beam emanates substantially within a single plane along the direction of beam propagation towards an object to be optically illuminated.

As shown in Fig. 1D, the planar laser illumination module of Fig. 1C comprises: a visible laser diode (VLD) 13 supported within an optical tube or block 14; a light collimating (i.e. focusing) lens 15 supported within the optical tube 14; and a cylindrical-type lens element 16 configured together to produce a beam of planar laser illumination 12. As shown in Fig. 1E, a focused laser beam 17 from the focusing lens 15 is directed on the input side of the cylindrical lens element 16, and a planar laser illumination beam 12 is produced as output therefrom.

As shown in Fig. 1F, the PLIIM-based system 1A of Fig. 1A comprises: a pair of planar laser illumination arrays 6A and 6B, each having a plurality of PLIMs 11A through 11F, and each PLIM being driven by a VLD driver circuit 18 controlled by a micro-controller 720 programmable (by camera control computer 22) to generate diverse types of drive-current functions that satisfy the input power and output intensity requirements of each VLD in a real-time manner; linear-type image formation and detection module 3; field of view (FOV) folding mirror 9, arranged in spatial relation with the image formation and detection module 3; an image frame grabber 19 operably connected to the linear-type image formation and detection module 3, for accessing 1-D images (i.e. 1-D digital image data sets) therefrom and building a 2-D digital image of the object being illuminated by the planar laser illumination arrays 6A and 6B; an image data buffer (e.g. VRAM) 20 for buffering 2-D images received from the image frame grabber 19; an image processing computer 21, operably connected to the image data buffer 20, for carrying out image processing algorithms (including bar code symbol decoding algorithms) and operators on digital images stored within the image data buffer, including image-based bar code symbol decoding software such as, for example, SwiftDecode™ Bar Code Decode Software, from Omniplanar, Inc., of Princeton, New Jersey (http://www.omniplanar.com); and a camera control computer 22 operably connected to the various components within the system for controlling the operation thereof in an orchestrated manner.

Detailed Description Of An Exemplary Realization Of The PLIIM-Based System Shown In Fig. 1B1 Through 1F

Referring now to Figs. 1G1 through 1N2, an exemplary realization of the PLIIM-based system shown in Figs. 1B1 through 1F will now be described in detail below.

As shown in Figs. 1G1 and 1G2, the PLIIM system 25 of the illustrative embodiment is contained within a compact housing 26 having height, length and width dimensions 45", 21.7", and 19.7" to enable easy mounting above a conveyor belt structure or the like. As shown in Fig. 1G1, the PLIIM-based system comprises an image formation and detection module 3, a pair of planar laser illumination arrays 6A, 6B, and a stationary field of view (FOV) folding structure (e.g. mirror, refractive element, or diffractive element) 9, as shown in Figs. 1B1 and 1B2. The function of the FOV folding mirror 9 is to fold the field of view (FOV) of the image formation and detection module 3 in a direction that is coplanar with the plane of laser illumination beams 7A and 7B produced by the planar illumination arrays 6A and 6B respectively. As shown, components 6A, 6B, 3 and 9 are fixedly mounted to an optical bench 8 supported within the compact housing 26 by way of metal mounting brackets that force the assembled optical

components to vibrate together on the optical bench. In turn, the optical bench is shock mounted to the system housing using techniques which absorb and dampen shock forces and vibration. The 1-D CCD imaging array 3A can be realized using a variety of commercially available high-speed line-scan camera systems such as, for example, the Piranha Model Nos. CT-P4, or CL-P4 High-Speed CCD Line Scan Camera, from Dalsa, Inc. USA—http://www.dalsa.com. Notably, image frame grabber 17, image data buffer (e.g. VRAM) 20, image processing computer 21, and camera control computer 22 are realized on one or more printed circuit (PC) boards contained within a camera and system electronic module 27 also mounted on the optical bench, or elsewhere in the system housing 26

In general, the linear CCD image detection array (i.e. sensor) 3A has a single row of pixels, each of which measures from several μm to several tens of μm along each dimension. Square pixels are most common, and most convenient for bar code scanning applications, but different aspect ratios are available. In principle, a linear CCD detection array can see only a small slice of the target object it is imaging at any given time. For example, for a linear CCD detection array having 2000 pixels, each of which is 10μm square, the detection array measures 2 cm long by 10μm high. If the imaging lens 3B in front of the linear detection array 3A causes an optical magnification of 10X, then the 2 cm length of the detection array will be projected onto a 20 cm length of the target object. In the other dimension, the 10μm height of the detection array becomes only 100μm when projected onto the target. Since any label to be scanned will typically measure more than a hundred μm or so in each direction, capturing a single image with a linear image detection array will be inadequate. Therefore, in practice, the linear image detection array employed in each of the PLIIM-based systems shown in Figs. 1A through 3J6 builds up a complete image of the target object by assembling a series of linear (1-D) images, each of which is taken of a different slice of the target object. Therefore, successful use of a linear image detection array in the PLIIM-based systems shown in Figs. 1A through 3J6 requires relative movement between the target object and the PLIIM system. In general, either the target object is moving and the PLIIM system is stationary, or else the field of view of the PLIIM-based system is swept across a relatively stationary target object, as shown in Figs. 3J1 through 3J4. This makes the linear image detection array a natural choice for conveyor scanning applications.

As shown in Fig. 1G1, the compact housing 26 has a relatively long light transmission window 28 of elongated dimensions for projecting the FOV of the image formation and detection (IFD) module 3 through the housing towards a predefined region of space outside thereof, within which objects can be illuminated and imaged by the system components on the optical bench 8. Also, the compact housing 26 has a pair of relatively short light transmission

apertures 29A and 29B closely disposed on opposite ends of light transmission window 28, with minimal spacing therebetween, as shown in Fig. 1G1, so that the FOV emerging from the housing 26 can spatially overlap in a coplanar manner with the substantially planar laser illumination beams projected through transmission windows 29A and 29B, as close to transmission window 28 as desired by the system designer, as shown in Figs. 1G3 and 1G4. Notably, in some applications, it is desired for such coplanar overlap between the FOV and planar laser illumination beams to occur very close to the light transmission windows 20, 29A and 29B (i.e. at short optical throw distances), but in other applications, for such coplanar overlap to occur at large optical throw distances.

In either event, each planar laser illumination array 6A and 6B is optically isolated from the FOV of the image formation and detection module 3. In the preferred embodiment, such optical isolation is achieved by providing a set of opaque wall structures 30A 30B about each planar laser illumination array, from the optical bench 8 to its light transmission window 29A or 29B, respectively. Such optical isolation structures prevent the image formation and detection module 3 from detecting any laser light transmitted directly from the planar laser illumination arrays 6A, 6B within the interior of the housing. Instead, the image formation and detection module 3 can only receive planar laser illumination that has been reflected off an illuminated object, and focused through the imaging subsystem of module 3.

As shown in Fig. 1G3, each planar laser illumination array 6A, 6B comprises a plurality of planar laser illumination modules 11A through 11F, each individually and adjustably mounted to an L-shaped bracket 32 which, in turn, is adjustably mounted to the optical bench. As shown, a stationary cylindrical lens array 299 is mounted in front of each PLIA (6A, 6B) adjacent the illumination window formed within the optics bench 8 of the PLIIM-based system. The function performed by cylindrical lens array 299 is to optically combine the individual PLIB components produced from the PLIMs constituting the PLIA, and project the combined PLIB components onto points along the surface of the object being illuminated. By virtue of this inventive feature, each point on the object surface being imaged will be illuminated by different sources of laser illumination located at different points in space (i.e. by a source of spatially coherent-reduced laser illumination), thereby reducing the RMS power of speckle-pattern noise observable at the linear image detection array of the PLIIM-based system.

As mentioned above, each planar laser illumination module 11 must be rotatably adjustable within its L-shaped bracket so as permit easy yet secure adjustment of the position of each PLIM 11 along a common alignment plane extending within L-bracket portion 32A thereby permitting precise positioning of each PLIM relative to the optical axis of the image formation and detection module 3. Once properly adjusted in terms of position on the L-bracket portion 32A, each PLIM can be securely locked by an allen or like screw threaded into

the body of the L-bracket portion 32A. Also, L-bracket portion 32B, supporting a plurality of PLIMs 11A through 11B, is adjustably mounted to the optical bench 8 and releasably locked thereto so as to permit precise lateral and/or angular positioning of the L-bracket 32B relative to the optical axis and FOV of the image formation and detection module 3. The function of such adjustment mechanisms is to enable the intensity distributions of the individual PLIMs to be additively configured together along a substantially singular plane, typically having a width or thickness dimension on the orders of the width and thickness of the spread or dispersed laser beam within each PLIM. When properly adjusted, the composite planar laser illumination beam will exhibit substantially uniform power density characteristics over the entire working range of the PLIIM-based system, as shown in Figs. 1K1 and 1K2.

In Fig. 1G3, the exact position of the individual PLIMs 11A through 11F along its L-bracket 32A is indicated relative to the optical axis of the imaging lens 3B within the image formation and detection module 3. Fig. 1G3 also illustrates the geometrical limits of each substantially planar laser illumination beam produced by its corresponding PLIM, measured relative to the folded FOV 10 produced by the image formation and detection module 3. Fig. 1G4, illustrates how, during object illumination and image detection operations, the FOV of the image formation and detection module 3 is first folded by FOV folding mirror 19, and then arranged in a spatially overlapping relationship with the resulting/composite planar laser illumination beams in a coplanar manner in accordance with the principles of the present invention.

Notably, the PLIIM-based system of Fig. 1G1 has an image formation and detection module with an imaging subsystem having a fixed focal distance lens and a fixed focusing mechanism. Thus, such a system is best used in either hand-held scanning applications, and/or bottom scanning applications where bar code symbols and other structures can be expected to appear at a particular distance from the imaging subsystem. In Fig. 1G5, the spatial limits for the FOV of the image formation and detection module are shown for two different scanning conditions, namely: when imaging the tallest package moving on a conveyor belt structure; and when imaging objects having height values close to the surface of the conveyor belt structure. In a PLIIM-based system having a fixed focal distance lens and a fixed focusing mechanism, the PLIIM-based system would be capable of imaging objects under one of the two conditions indicated above, but not under both conditions. In a PLIIM-based system having a fixed focal length lens and a variable focusing mechanism, the system can adjust to image objects under either of these two conditions.

In order that PLLIM-based subsystem 25 can be readily interfaced to and an integrated (e.g. embedded) within various types of computer-based systems, as shown in Figs. 9 through 34C, subsystem 25 also comprises an I/0 subsystem 500 operably connected to camera control

computer 22 and image processing computer 21, and a network controller 501 for enabling high-speed data communication with others computers in a local or wide area network using packet-based networking protocols (e.g. Ethernet, AppleTalk, etc.) well known in the art.

In the PLIIM-based system of Fig. 1G1, special measures are undertaken to ensure that (i) a minimum safe distance is maintained between the VLDs in each PLIM and the user's eyes, and (ii) the planar laser illumination beam is prevented from directly scattering into the FOV of the image formation and detection module, from within the system housing, during object illumination and imaging operations. Condition (i) above can be achieved by using a light shield 32A or 32B shown in Figs. 1G6 and 1G7, respectively, whereas condition (ii) above can be achieved by ensuring that the planar laser illumination beam from the PLIAs and the field of view (FOV) of the imaging lens (in the IFD module) do not spatially overlap on any optical surfaces residing within the PLIIM-based system. Instead, the planar laser illumination beams are permitted to spatially overlap with the FOV of the imaging lens only outside of the system housing, measured at a particular point beyond the light transmission window 28, through which the FOV 10 is projected to the exterior of the system housing, to perform object imaging operations.

<u>Detailed Description Of The Planar Laser Illumination Modules (PLIMs) Employed In The Planar Laser Illumination Arrays (PLIAs) Of The Illustrative Embodiments</u>

Referring now to Figs. 1G8 through 1I2, the construction of each PLIM 14 and 15 used in the planar laser illumination arrays (PLIAs) will now be described in greater detail below.

As shown in Fig. 1G8, each planar laser illumination array (PLIA) 6A, 6B employed in the PLIIM-based system of Fig. 1G1, comprises an array of planar laser illumination modules (PLIMs) 11 mounted on the L-bracket structure 32, as described hereinabove. As shown in Figs. 1G9 through 1G11, each PLIM of the illustrative embodiment disclosed herein comprises an assembly of subcomponents: a VLD mounting block 14 having a tubular geometry with a hollow central bore 14A formed entirely therethrough, and a v-shaped notch 14B formed on one end thereof; a visible laser diode (VLD) 13 (e.g. Mitsubishi ML1XX6 Series high-power 658nm AlGaInP semiconductor laser) axially mounted at the end of the VLD mounting block, opposite the v-shaped notch 14B, so that the laser beam produced from the VLD 13 is aligned substantially along the central axis of the central bore 14A; a cylindrical lens 16, made of optical glass (e.g. borosilicate) or plastic having the optical characteristics specified, for example, in Figs. 1G1 and 1G2, and fixedly mounted within the V-shaped notch 14B at the end of the VLD mounting block 14, using an optical cement or other lens fastening means, so that the central axis of the cylindrical lens 16 is oriented substantially perpendicular to the optical axis of the

central bore 14A; and a focusing lens 15, made of central glass (e.g. borosilicate) or plastic having the optical characteristics shown, for example, in Figs. IH and 1H2, mounted within the central bore 14A of the VLD mounting block 14 so that the optical axis of the focusing lens 15 is substantially aligned with the central axis of the bore 14A, and located at a distance from the VLD which causes the laser beam output from the VLD 13 to be converging in the direction of the cylindrical lens 16. Notably, the function of the cylindrical lens 16 is to disperse (i.e. spread) the focused laser beam from focusing lens 15 along the plane in which the cylindrical lens 16 has curvature, as shown in Fig. 1I1 while the characteristics of the planar laser illumination beam (PLIB) in the direction transverse to the propagation plane are determined by the focal length of the focusing lens 15, as illustrated in Figs. 1I1 and 1I2.

As will be described in greater detail hereinafter, the focal length of the focusing lens 15 within each PLIM hereof is preferably selected so that the substantially planar laser illumination beam produced from the cylindrical lens 16 is focused at the farthest object distance in the field of view of the image formation and detection module 3, as shown in Fig. 1I2, in accordance with the "FBAFOD" principle of the present invention. As shown in the exemplary embodiment of Figs. 1I1 and 1I2, wherein each PLIM has maximum object distance of about 61 inches (i.e. 155 centimeters), and the cross-sectional dimension of the planar laser illumination beam emerging from the cylindrical lens 16, in the non-spreading (height) direction, oriented normal to the propagation plane as defined above, is about 0.15 centimeters and ultimately focused down to about 0.06 centimeters at the maximal object distance (i.e. the farthest distance at which the system is designed to capture images). The behavior of the height dimension of the planar laser illumination beam is determined by the focal length of the focusing lens 15 embodied within the PLIM. Proper selection of the focal length of the focusing lens 15 in each PLIM and the distance between the VLD 13 and the focusing lens 15B indicated by reference No. (D), can be determined using the thin lens equation (1) below and the maximum object distance required by the PLIIM-based system, typically specified by the end-user. As will be explained in greater detail hereinbelow, this preferred method of VLD focusing helps compensate for decreases in the power density of the incident planar laser illumination beam (on target objects) due to the fact that the width of the planar laser illumination beam increases in length for increasing distances away from the imaging subsystem (i.e. object distances).

After specifying the optical components for each PLIM, and completing the assembly thereof as described above, each PLIM is adjustably mounted to the L bracket position 32A by way of a set of mounting/adjustment screws turned through fine-threaded mounting holes formed thereon. In Fig. 1G10, the plurality of PLIMs 11A through 11F are shown adjustably mounted on the L-bracket at positions and angular orientations which ensure substantially uniform power density characteristics in both the near and far field portions of the planar laser

illumination field produced by planar laser illumination arrays (PLIAs) 6A and 6B cooperating together in accordance with the principles of the present invention. Notably, the relative positions of the PLIMs indicated in Fig. 1G9 were determined for a particular set of a commercial VLDs 13 used in the illustrative embodiment of the present invention, and, as the output beam characteristics will vary for each commercial VLD used in constructing each such PLIM, it is therefore understood that each such PLIM may need to be mounted at different relative positions on the L-bracket of the planar laser illumination array to obtain, from the resulting system, substantially uniform power density characteristics at both near and far regions of the planar laser illumination field produced thereby.

While a refractive-type cylindrical lens element 16 has been shown mounted at the end of each PLIM of the illustrative embodiments, it is understood each cylindrical lens element can be realized using refractive, reflective and/or diffractive technology and devices, including reflection and transmission type holographic optical elements (HOEs) well know in the art and described in detail in International Application No. WO 99/57579 published on November 11, 1999, incorporated herein by reference. As used hereinafter and in the claims, the terms "cylindrical lens", "cylindrical lens element" and "cylindrical optical element (COE)" shall be deemed to embrace all such alternative embodiments of this aspect of the present invention.

The only requirement of the optical element mounted at the end of each PLIM is that it has sufficient optical properties to convert a focusing laser beam transmitted therethrough, into a laser beam which expands or otherwise spreads out only along a single plane of propagation, while the laser beam is substantially unaltered (i.e. neither compressed or expanded) in the direction normal to the propagation plane.

<u>Alternative Embodiments of The Planar Laser Illumination Module (PLIM) Of The Present Invention</u>

There are means for producing substantially planar laser beams (PLIBs) without the use of cylindrical optical elements. For example, US Patent No. 4,826,299 to Powell, incorporated herein by reference, discloses a linear diverging lens which has the appearance of a prism with a relatively sharp radius at the apex, capable of expanding a laser beam in only one direction. In Fig. 1G16A, a first type Powell lens 16A is shown embodied within a PLIM housing by simply replacing the cylindrical lens element 16 with a suitable Powell lens 16A taught in US Patent No. 4,826,299. In this alternative embodiment, the Powell lens 16A is disposed after the focusing/collimating lens 15' and VLD 13. In Fig. 1G16B, generic Powell lens 16B is shown embodied within a PLIM housing along with a collimating/focusing lens 15' and VLD 13. The resulting PLIMs can be used in any PLIIM-based system of the present invention.

Alternatively, US Patent No. 4,589,738 to Ozaki discloses an optical arrangement which employs a convex reflector or a concave lens to spread a laser beam radially and then a cylindrical-concave reflector to converge the beam linearly to project a laser line. Like the Powell lens, the optical arrangement of US Patent No. 4,589,738 can be readily embodied within the PLIM of the present invention, for use in a PLIIM-based system employing the same.

In Figs. 1G17 through 1G17D, there is shown an alternative embodiment of the PLIM of the present invention 729, wherein a visible laser diode (VLD) 13, and a pair of small cylindrical (i.e. PCX and PCV) lenses 730 and 731 are both mounted within a lens barrel 732 of compact construction. As shown, the lens barrel 732 permits independent adjustment of the lenses along both translational and rotational directions, thereby enabling the generation of a substantially planar laser beam therefrom. The PCX–type lens 730 has one plano surface 730A and a positive cylindrical surface 730B with its base and the edges cut in a circular profile. The function of the PCX-type lens 730 is laser beam focusing. The PCV-type lens 731 has one plano surface 731A and a negative cylindrical surface 731B with its base and edges cut in a circular profile. The function of the PCX-type lens 730 is laser beam spreading (i.e. diverging or planarizing).

As shown in Figs. 1G17B and 1G17C, the PCX lens 730 is capable of undergoing translation in the x direction for focusing, and rotation about the x axis to ensure that it only effects the beam along one axis. Set-type screws or other lens fastening mechanisms can be used to secure the position of the PCX lens within its barrel 732 once its position has been properly adjusted during calibration procedure.

As shown in Fig. 1G17D, the PCV lens 731 is capable of undergoing rotation about the x axis to ensure that it only effects the beam along one axis. Figs. 1G17E and 1G17F illustrate that the VLD 13 requires rotation about the y and x axes, for aiming and desmiling the planar laser illumination beam produced from the PLIM. Set-type screws or other lens fastening mechanisms can be used to secure the position and alignment of the PCV-type lens 731 within its barrel 732 once its position has been properly adjusted during calibration procedure. Likewise, set-type screws or other lens fastening mechanisms can be used to secure the position and alignment of the VLD 13 within its barrel 732 once its position has been properly adjusted during calibration procedure.

In the illustrative embodiments, one or more PLIMs 729 described above can be integrated together to produce a PLIA in accordance with the principles of the present invention. Such the PLIMs associated with the PLIA can be mounted along a common bracket, having PLIM-based multi-axial alignment and pitch mechanisms as illustrated in Figs. 1B4 and 1B5 and described below.

Multi-Axis VLD Mounting Assembly Embodied Within Planar Laser Illumination (PLIA) Of The Present Invention

In order to achieve the desired degree of uniformity in the power density along the PLIB generated from a PLIIM-based system of the present invention, it will be helpful to use the multi-axial VLD mounting assembly of Figs. 1B4 and 1B in each PLIA employed therein. As shown in Fig. 1B4, each PLIM is mounted along its PLIA so that (1) the PLIM can be adjustably tilted about the optical axis of its VLD 13, by at least a few degrees measured from the horizontal reference plane as shown in Fig. 1B4, and so that (2) each VLD block can be adjustably pitched forward for alignment with other VLD beams, as illustrated in Fig. 1B5. The tilt-adjustment function can be realized by any mechanism that permits the VLD block to be releasably tilted relative to a base plate or like structure 740 which serves as a reference plane, from which the tilt parameter is measured. The pitch-adjustment function can be realized by any mechanism that permits the VLD block to be releasably pitched relative to a base plate or like structure which serves as a reference plane, from which the pitch parameter is measured. In a preferred embodiment, such flexibility in VLD block position and orientation can be achieved using a three axis gimbel-like suspension, or other pivoting mechanism, permitting rotational adjustment of the VLD block 14 about the X, Y and Z principle axes embodied therewithin. Set-type screws or other fastening mechanisms can be used to secure the position and alignment of the VLD block 14 relative to the PLIA base plate 740 once the position and orientation of the VLD block has been properly adjusted during a VLD calibration procedure.

Detailed Description Of The Image Formation And Detection Module Employed In The PLIIM-Based System Of The First Generalized Embodiment Of The Present Invention

In Fig. 1J1, there is shown a geometrical model (based on the thin lens equation) for the simple imaging subsystem 3B employed in the image formation and detection module 3 in the PLIIM-based system of the first generalized embodiment shown in Fig. 1A. As shown in Fig. 11J1, this simple imaging system 3B consists of a source of illumination (e.g. laser light reflected off a target object) and an imaging lens. The illumination source is at an object distance r_0 measured from the center of the imaging lens. In Fig. 1J1, some representative rays of light have been traced from the source to the front lens surface. The imaging lens is considered to be of the converging type which, for ordinary operating conditions, focuses the incident rays from the illumination source to form an image which is located at an image distance r_i on the opposite side of the imaging lens. In Fig. 1J1, some representative rays have also been traced from the back lens surface to the image. The imaging lens itself is characterized by a focal length f, the definition of which will be discussed in greater detail hereinbelow.

For the purpose of simplifying the mathematical analysis, the imaging lens is considered to be a thin lens, that is, idealized to a single surface with no thickness. The parameters f, r_0 and r_i, all of which have units of length, are related by the "thin lens" equation (1) set forth below:

$$\frac{1}{f} = \frac{1}{r_0} + \frac{1}{r_i} \qquad (1)$$

(1)

This equation may be solved for the image distance, which yields expression (2)

$$r_i = \frac{f r_0}{r_0 - f} \qquad (2)$$

(2)

If the object distance r_0 goes to infinity, then expression (2) reduces to $r_i = f$. Thus, the focal length of the imaging lens is the image distance at which light incident on the lens from an infinitely distant object will be focused. Once f is known, the image distance for light from any other object distance can be determined using (2).

Field of View of The Imaging Lens and Resolution of The Detected Image

The basic characteristics of an image detected by the IFD module 3 hereof may be determined using the technique of ray tracing, in which representative rays of light are drawn from the source through the imaging lens and to the image. Such ray tracing is shown in Fig. 1J2. A basic rule of ray tracing is that a ray from the illumination source that passes through the center of the imaging lens continues undeviated to the image. That is, a ray that passes through the center of the imaging lens is not refracted. Thus, the size of the field of view (FOV) of the imaging lens may be determined by tracing rays (backwards) from the edges of the image detection/sensing array through the center of the imaging lens and out to the image plane as shown in Fig. 1J2, where d is the dimension of a pixel, n is the number of pixels on the image detector array in this direction, and W is the dimension of the field of view of the imaging lens. Solving for the FOV dimension W, and substituting for r_i using expression (2) above yields expression (3) as follows:

$$W = \frac{dn(r_0 - f)}{f}$$

(3)

Now that the size of the field of view is known, the dpi resolution of the image is determined. The dpi resolution of the image is simply the number of pixels divided by the dimension of the field of view. Assuming that all the dimensions of the system are measured in meters, the dots per inch (dpi) resolution of the image is given by the expression (4) as follows:

$$dpi = \frac{f}{39.37d(r_0 - f)} \qquad (4)$$

(4)

<u>Working Distance and Depth of Field of the Imaging Lens</u>

Light returning to the imaging lens that emanates from object surfaces slightly closer to and farther from the imaging lens than object distance r_0 will also appear to be in good focus on the image. From a practical standpoint, "good focus" is decided by the decoding software 21 used when the image is too blurry to allow the code to be read (i.e. decoded), then the imaging subsystem is said to be "out of focus". If the object distance r_0 at which the imaging subsystem is ideally focused is known, then it can be calculated theoretically the closest and farthest "working distances" of the PLIIM-based system, given by parameters r_{near} and r_{far}, respectively, at which the system will still function. These distance parameters are given by expression (5) and (6) as follows:

$$r_{near} = \frac{fr_0(f + DF)}{f^2 + DFr_0}$$

(5)

$$r_{far} = \frac{fr_0(f - DF)}{f^2 - DFr_0} \qquad (6)$$

where D is the diameter of the largest permissible "circle of confusion" on the image detection array. A circle of confusion is essentially the blurred out light that arrives from points at image distances other than object distance r_0. When the circle of confusion becomes too large (when the blurred light spreads out too much) then one will lose focus. The value of parameter D for a given imaging subsystem is usually estimated from experience during system design, and then determined more precisely, if necessary, later through laboratory experiment.

Another optical parameter of interest is the total depth of field Δr, which is the difference between distances r_{far} and r_{near}; this parameter is the total distance over which the imaging system will be able to operate when focused at object distance r_0. This optical parameter may be expressed by equation (7) below:

$$\Delta r = \frac{2Df^2Fr_0(r_0 - f)}{f^4 - D^2F^2r_0^2} \qquad (7)$$

It should be noted that the parameter Δr is generally not symmetric about r_0; the depth of field usually extends farther towards infinity from the ideal focal distance than it does back towards the imaging lens.

<u>Modeling A Fixed Focal Length Imaging Subsystem Used In The Image Formation And Detection Module Of The Present Invention</u>

A typical imaging (i.e. camera) lens used to construct a fixed focal-length image formation and detection module of the present invention might typically consist of three to fifteen or more individual optical elements contained within a common barrel structure. The inherent complexity of such an optical module prevents its performance from being described very accurately using a "thin lens analysis", described above by equation (1). However, the results of a thin lens analysis can be used as a useful guide when choosing an imaging lens for a particular PLIIM-based system application.

A typical imaging lens can focus light (illumination) originating anywhere from an infinite distance away, to a few feet away. However, regardless of the origin of such illumination, its rays must be brought to a sharp focus at exactly the same location (e.g. the film plane or image detector), which (in an ordinary camera) does not move. At first glance, this requirement may appear unusual because the thin lens equation (1) above states that the image distance at which light is focused through a thin lens is a function of the object distance at which the light originates, as shown in Fig. 1J3. Thus, it would appear that the position of the image detector would depend on the distance at which the object being imaged is located. An imaging subsystem having a variable focal distance lens assembly avoids this difficulty because several of its lens elements are capable of movement relative to the others. For a fixed focal length imaging lens, the leading lens element(s) can move back and forth a short distance, usually accomplished by the rotation of a helical barrel element which converts rotational motion into purely linear motion of the lens elements. This motion has the effect of changing the image distance to compensate for a change in object distance, allowing the image detector to remain in place, as shown in the schematic optical diagram of Fig. 1J4.

Modeling A Variable Focal Length (Zoom) Imaging Lens Used In The Image Formation And Detection Module Of The Present Invention

As shown in Fig. 1J5, a variable focal length (zoom) imaging subsystem has an additional level of internal complexity. A zoom-type imaging subsystem is capable of changing its focal length over a given range; a longer focal length produces a smaller field of view at a given object distance. Consider the case where the PLIIM-based system needs to illuminate and image a certain object over a range of object distances, but requires the illuminated object to appear the same size in all acquired images. When the object is far away, the PLIIM-based system will generate control signals that select a long focal length, causing the field of view to shrink (to compensate for the decrease in apparent size of the object due to distance). When the object is close, the PLIIM-based system will generate control signals that select a shorter focal length, which widens the field of view and preserves the relative size of the object. In many bar code scanning applications, a zoom-type imaging subsystem in the PLIIM-based system (as shown in Figs. 3A through 3J5) ensures that all acquired images of bar code symbols have the same dpi image resolution regardless of the position of the bar code symbol within the object distance of the PLIIM-based system.

As shown in Fig. 1J5, a zoom-type imaging subsystem has two groups of lens elements which are able to undergo relative motion. The leading lens elements are moved to achieve focus in the same way as for a fixed focal length lens. Also, there is a group of lenses in the

middle of the barrel which move back and forth to achieve the zoom, that is, to change the effective focal length of all the lens elements acting together.

<u>Several Techniques For Accommodating The Field of View (FOV) Of A PLIIM System To Particular End-User Environments</u>

In many applications, a PLIIM system of the present invention may include an imaging subsystem with a very long focal length imaging lens (assembly), and this PLIIM-based system must be installed in end-user environments having a substantially shorter object distance range, and/or field of view (FOV) requirements or the like. Such problems can exist for PLIIM systems employing either fixed or variable focal length imaging subsystems. To accommodate a particular PLIIM-based system for installation in such environments, three different techniques illustrated in Figs. 1K1-1K2, 1L1 and 1L2 can be used.

In Figs. 1K1 and 1K2, the focal length of the imaging lens 3B can be fixed and set at the factory to produce a field of view having specified geometrical characteristics for particular applications. In Fig. K1, the focal length of the image formation and detection module 3 is fixed during the optical design stage so that the fixed field of view (FOV) thereof substantially matches the scan field width measured at the top of the scan field, and thereafter overshoots the scan field and extends on down to the plane of the conveyor belt 34. In this FOV arrangement, the dpi image resolution will be greater for packages having a higher height profile above the conveyor belt, and less for envelope-type packages with low height profiles. In Fig. 1K2, the focal length of the image formation and detection module 3 is fixed during the optical design stage so that the fixed field of view thereof substantially matches the plane slightly above the conveyor belt 34 where envelope-type packages are transported. In this FOV arrangement, the dpi image resolution will be maximized for envelope-type packages which are expected to be transported along the conveyor belt structure, and this system will be unable to read bar codes on packages having a height-profile exceeding the low-profile scanning field of the system.

In Fig. 1L, a FOV beam folding mirror arrangement is used to fold the optical path of the imaging subsystem within the interior of the system housing so that the FOV emerging from the system housing has geometrical characteristics that match the scanning application at hand. As shown, this technique involves mounting a plurality of FOV folding mirrors 9A through 9E on the optical bench of the PLIIM system to bounce the FOV of the imaging subsystem 3B back and forth before the FOV emerges from the system housing. Using this technique, when the FOV emerges from the system housing, it will have expanded to a size appropriate for covering the entire scan field of the system. This technique is easier to practice with image formation and detection modules having linear image detectors, for which the FOV folding mirrors only have

to expand in one direction as the distance from the imaging subsystem increases. In Fig. 1L, this direction of FOV expansion occurs in the direction perpendicular to the page. In the case of area-type PLIIM-based systems, as shown in Figs. 4A through 6F4, the FOV folding mirrors have to accommodate a 3-D FOV which expands in two directions. Thus an internal folding path is easier to arrange for linear-type PLIIM-based systems.

In Fig. 1L2, the fixed field of view of an imaging subsystem is expanded across a working space (e.g. conveyor belt structure) by using a motor 35 to controllably rotate the FOV 10 during object illumination and imaging operations. When designing a linear-type PLIIM-based system for industrial scanning applications, wherein the focal length of the imaging subsystem is fixed, a higher dpi image resolution will occasionally be required. This implies using a longer focal length imaging lens, which produces a narrower FOV and thus higher dpi image resolution. However, in many applications, the image formation and detection module in the PLIIM-based system cannot be physically located far enough away from the conveyor belt (and within the system housing) to enable the narrow FOV to cover the entire scanning field of the system. In this case, a FOV folding mirror 9F can be made to rotate, relative to stationary for folding mirror 9G, in order to sweep the linear FOV from side to side over the entire width of the conveyor belt, depending on where the bar coded package is located. Ideally, this rotating FOV folding mirror 9F would have only two mirror positions, but this will depend on how small the FOV is at the top of the scan field. The rotating FOV folding mirror can be driven by motor 35 operated under the control of the camera control computer 22, as described herein.

Method of Adjusting the Focal Characteristics of Planar Laser Illumination Beams Generated by Planar Laser Illumination Arrays Used in Conjunction with Image Formation And Detection Modules Employing Fixed Focal Length Imaging Lenses

In the case of a fixed focal length camera lens, the planar laser illumination beam 7A, 7B is focused at the farthest possible object distance in the PLIIM-based system. In the case of fixed focal length imaging lens, this focus control technique of the present invention is not employed to compensate for decrease in the power density of the reflected laser beam as a function of $1/r^2$ distance from the imaging subsystem, but rather to compensate for a decrease in power density of the planar laser illumination beam on the target object due to an increase in object distance away from the imaging subsystem.

It can be shown that laser return light that is reflected by the target object (and measured/detected at any arbitrary point in space) decreases in intensity as the inverse square of the object distance. In the PLIIM-based system of the present invention, the relevant decrease in intensity is not related to such "inverse square" law decreases, but rather to the fact that the

width of the planar laser illumination beam increases as the object distance increases. This "beam-width/object-distance" law decrease in light intensity will be described in greater detail below.

Using a thin lens analysis of the imaging subsystem, it can be shown that when any form of illumination having a uniform power density E_0 (i.e. power per unit area) is directed incident on a target object surface and the reflected laser illumination from the illuminated object is imaged through an imaging lens having a fixed focal length f and f-stop F, the power density E_{pix} (measured at the pixel of the image detection array and expressed as a function of the object distance r) is provided by the expression (8) set forth below:

$$E_{pix} = \frac{E_0}{8F}(1-\frac{f}{r})^2 \qquad (8)$$

Fig. 1M1 shows a plot of pixel power density E_{pix} vs. object distance r calculated using the arbitrary but reasonable values $E_0 = 1\ W/m^2$, f = 80 mm and F = 4.5. This plot demonstrates that, in a counter-intuitive manner, the power density at the pixel (and therefore the power incident on the pixel, as its area remains constant) actually increases as the object distance increases. Careful analysis explains this particular optical phenomenon by the fact that the field of view of each pixel on the image detection array increases slightly faster with increases in object distances than would be necessary to compensate for the $1/r^2$ return light losses. A more analytical explanation is provided below.

The width of the planar laser illumination beam increases as object distance r increases. At increasing object distances, the constant output power from the VLD in each planar laser illumination module (PLIM) is spread out over a longer beam width, and therefore the power density at any point along the laser beam width decreases. To compensate for this phenomenon, the planar laser illumination beam of the present invention is focused at the farthest object distance so that the height of the planar laser illumination beam becomes smaller as the object distance increases; as the height of the planar laser illumination beam becomes narrower towards the farthest object distance, the laser beam power density increases at any point along the width of the planar laser illumination beam. The decrease in laser beam power density due to an increase in planar laser beam width and the increase in power density due to a decrease in planar laser beam height, roughly cancel each other out, resulting in a power density which either remains approximately constant or increases as a function of increasing object distance, as the application at hand may require.